

Tra Huong Vu

## **A B2B DIGITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATION PLAN**

Case Company: Machinery and Informatics Technology Jsc.

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis was made as a development plan for a Vietnamese trade business selling advanced equipment – Machinery and Informatics Technology Joint Stock Company (MIT Jsc.). The expected outcome of the thesis is a digital marketing communication plan for MIT Jsc. to introduce its online presence and increase its brand awareness, thus larger its customer base across Vietnam.

At this moment, the case company is targeting at government institutions, authorities, and industrial organizations which have the needs for technology advancement from well-developed foreign countries to innovate their operational systems. MIT Jsc. has been applying its market insight, partnerships with foreign suppliers and experienced service engineers to do business mainly with several key clients and build strong relationships with them. Recognizing the rising trend in market demand, the firm's director decided to expand its customer base by marketing communications via digital channels.

The main research method was desktop research, which studies a variety of secondary materials such as books, reports, research papers, and online articles. The thesis consists of three main chapters. Firstly, related marketing management theory was reviewed, from strategic marketing, organizational buying behavior, customer relationship management, to integrated and digital marketing communications. Next, business situation is analyzed to capture the market trends and revise the competitive position of the case company in its target markets. Finally, a digital marketing communications plan was developed based on those findings.

MIT Jsc.'s digital marketing communications plan is designed to raise in B2B customers' mind the need to invest on modern equipment, increasing brand awareness in the online context, and integrating with other marketing efforts to build and sustain strong brand relationships. Messages are conveyed by various digital tools including the website, search engines, email, and social media, consistently emphasizing the firm's online value proposition of using its expertise in modern technology to suggest the most suitable solutions for its clients and perform qualified services.

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Keywords: marketing planning, digital marketing, integrated marketing communication, B2B marketing, organizational buying behavior

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The Internet has become a social revolution in information with its applications increasingly used to serve human needs, from learning, entertainment, shopping to operations management, and promotion. Together with the development of the online society, consumers began to change their traditional habits, resulting in a great transformation of the markets. (Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman & Hansen 2012, 131.) Since the Internet has proved itself as a promising destination to search for information, the presence of a business in the online environment is usually expected by customers. Along with traditional media such as TV and press, digital marketing has been developed, bringing great benefits for businesses. (Charlesworth 2014, 3.)

Internet technology has been replacing some classic methods to deliver products and services as well as to capture information about customer needs. Not only does an interconnected network broaden the scale of obtaining customer information, it also enhances the ability to target the right audience. Thanks to the Internet, manufacturers and service providers are enabled to timely and effectively improve their offerings in accordance with individual requirements of customers. It allows companies to reach a much larger customer base and narrow down the focus of marketing efforts at the same time. (Kotler et al. 2012, 131.) In this modern era, online marketing is no longer new to enterprises. However, all the advantages of digital technology can only be achieved with an appropriate strategic approach (Ryan & Jones 2009, 19).

The idea for this thesis arose when Machinery and Informatics Technology Joint Stock Company (MIT Jsc.) deployed a strategic decision to enhance the implementation of digital technology in its marketing function. The thesis topic was agreed between the director of MIT and the author based on the former one's need and the latter one's competence. The commissioner would like the thesis to focus on the use of digital channels to expand its customer base, build strong reputation and support B2B marketing in a cost-effective way.

Machinery and Informatics Technologies Jsc. is a SME in Vietnam which provides technical equipment originating from advanced industrial countries and related services such as installation, user training, maintenance, and repair. The categories of products offered include, for example, scientific and technological equipment serving research and inspection, testing equipment which ensure safety in production, teaching equipment, systems of surveillance and

security equipment, equipment used for operational activities of the authorities. The company concentrates on customers who are institutions under the General Department of Customs, state-owned enterprises in coal mining industry, public hospitals, modern universities, and private businesses in industrial manufacturing sectors.

The thesis consists of three main chapters. The first chapter is a review of related marketing management theory such as strategic marketing, organizational buying behavior, customer relationship management, integrated and digital marketing communications. Based on the theoretical framework, an empirical research is conducted, followed by a development plan tailored for the case company. Finally, the thesis outcomes, level of objective achievement, and limitations are presented in the conclusions and discussion parts.

The concentration of the thesis is the application of digital marketing tools that thoroughly integrates with the company's strategic marketing communications. From this fundamental research problem, there are several research sub-questions which needed to be studied, i.e. which digital media should be used to effectively reach the target audience, how to use those channels in a way that they complement to each other and contribute to business performance? Finding answers to these questions requires clear understanding of the business environment, capability, customer needs and behavior, competitors' performance and a systematic approach to form a strategic digital marketing communication plan. The main research method is desktop study, which puts into consideration related journals, articles, and reports from a variety of sources to ensure critical evaluation. In addition, interviews are conducted with the director of MIT Jsc. and a senior lecturer specialized in marketing from Hanoi University to obtain relevant information about digital marketing practice in the particular business sector which the case company is operating in.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Strategic marketing**

Marketing can be defined as the process of identifying, anticipating, and delivering values to satisfy customer needs in a profitable way (Kotler & Armstrong 2012, 5). Although there has been much debate about a definition of marketing that is applicable to a wide range of products, companies, industries, and markets, this definition underlines the fundamental aspect of marketing which is to be customer-oriented (Kotler & Armstrong 2012, 39).

Customers lie at the heart of all businesses, influencing all business activities from product design to price setting and promotion methods in order to deliver the right product at the right time in the right place (Kotler et al. 2012, 7). Accordingly, effective marketing generates the most value out of customer spending, fulfills their needs, thus resulting in satisfaction and ultimate success for companies.

Marketing is accomplished by a thorough process of marketing planning, starting from the determination of corporate mission, which acts as a guideline for the entire organization. Next, the marketers try to acquire a comprehensive understanding of their current situation by collecting data and analyze the marketing environment, both internal and external, in micro and macro scales. Based on that information, an appropriate marketing strategy and a detailed action plan are created to lead the firm towards its vision. Notably, instead of a linear sequence, the marketing planning process is rather a continuous circle where the implementation and control stages always accompany with evaluation and adjustment, which refer back to the stage of unceasing update of the dynamic marketing environment. (Kotler & Armstrong 2012, 40.) Therefore, a marketing plan is crucial to coordinate and focus efforts on what is important, integrate all functions of a business in value propositions, thus contributing to the company's success.

As mentioned earlier, the formulation of marketing strategy is one stage in marketing planning. Strategy is a plan for a business to execute its mission, to compete successfully, to attract and satisfy customers in order to achieve business goals. The scope of marketing strategy includes all



that develop competitive advantages for a firm, matching its strengths with available market opportunities, eliminating its weaknesses, and preparing itself to cope with market threats. An essence of marketing strategy is emphasized at segmentation, targeting, and positioning before the generic guidelines in marketing strategy are then broken down into marketing tactics with the design of the marketing mix. (Kotler & Armstrong 2012, 48.)

### **2.1.1 Segmentation, targeting, and positioning (STP)**

The way a company approaches its market can be categorized into two main strategies, namely mass marketing and differentiation. Basically, mass marketing means offering the whole market with the same product, embracing the idea of different people share the same demand, and bringing the most obvious benefit of economy of scale. (Kotler et al. 2012, 368.) However, it is plain to see that in most of the cases, different people want different things; resulting in the strategy when businesses differentiate their offering to satisfy specific needs of the target groups. This approach firstly requires the act of dividing the market into segments, called segmentation, and followed by targeting and positioning (Kotler & Armstrong 2012, 49).

#### **Segmentation**

The business market consists of numerous organizations in different size, operating in different industries, performing different tasks, presenting distinct characteristics and having different needs. Criteria used to classify the market into segments are valid only when within each group, customers respond in a similar way to a specified set of marketing efforts. For this reason, Kotler & Armstrong (2012, 200) have suggested five requirements for segmentation, including definability to avoid doubt between different parts of the market, measurability in terms of size, sales rate, growth rate, etc., accessibility via communication channels, suitability with product purchase, and actionability meaning businesses being capable of perform any actions in meeting the need of the segment. Accordingly, the industrial markets might be divided based on demographic factors such as size, business sectors, and location; operating variables like technology or user status; and purchasing approaches: centralized or decentralized, relationship or non-relationship approach (Kotler et al. 2012, 389-390).

## **Targeting and positioning**

After market segments have been identified, the next step is to assess each segment's potential to select one or more of them whose demand best fits with the company's capabilities. This process is known as targeting, aiming to focus resources of a business, which are usually limited, on the groups that present the greatest opportunities. Since target markets are then carefully analyzed to acquire thorough understanding about customer insights, buying behavior, growth rate, and changes in demand, companies are able to design their offering in a way that delivers the most value to the chosen segments and sustain its profitability. (Arens, Weigold, & Arens 2011, 204.)

A brand position can be understood as the key features, image and benefits associated with the brand in target customer's collective mind (Shimp 2010, 128). Since the actual place where different companies compete with each other is nowhere else but customer's mind, it is the one with favorable position that holds a competitive advantage in influencing purchase decision. Positioning is achieved by shaping the marketing mix, such as product design, price, sales channels, and promotion methods, towards demonstrating a consistent image to a target group of audience. It is also important to remember that positioning, once being acknowledged by the market, will be very hard to change. (Kotler & Armstrong 2012, 207.)

### **2.1.2 Marketing mix**

The definition of marketing mix provided by Kotler & Armstrong (2012) is "the set of tactical marketing tools that the firm blends to product the response it wants in the target market". A popular concept for the constituent elements of marketing mix is the 4Ps: Product, Price, Place, and Promotion. However, there is also another way to consider the marketing mix by seeing from the perspective of customer with the 4Cs, which consist of Customer Solution, Cost, Convenience, and Communication. It could be argued that the 4Cs might be a better approach as it reflects a customer-oriented mindset, which is critical in this marketing era of customer value and relationship (McClean 2012, cited 22.03.2016). The equivalence between the 4Ps and the 4Cs is illustrated in Figure 1.



*FIGURE 1 Four elements of the marketing mix (McClellan 2012, cited 22.03.2016).*

The first element of the marketing mix, Product or Customer Solution, involves product variety, quality, design, features, brand name, packaging, and augmented services (Kotler & Armstrong 2012, 51, 53). While businesses are deciding what they sell, customers are seeing themselves as how a product can solve their problem the most effectively (McClellan 2012, cited 22.03.2016).

Price is not only the amount of money a buyer spends to acquire the product but also includes allowances, payment methods, and credit terms (Kotler & Armstrong 2012, 52, 53). However, customers are concerned about an even more comprehensive sum of the total Cost for them to obtain, consume, and dispose the product (McClellan 2012, cited 22.03.2016).

Place represents the part how companies make it accessible for their customers to purchase their product, comprising distribution channels, geographical coverage, store locations and opening time, possibly also online stores and delivery options. In other words, this element of the marketing mix aims at providing as much Convenience as possible for customers to obtain the product. (Kotler & Armstrong 2012, 52, 53.)

Finally, the fourth P, Promotion, is the set of activities, such as advertising, personal selling, and public relation, to communicate the value proposition of the product and convince the target customers to make a purchase. It can be regarded here that the fourth C, Communication, is more thoroughgoing as it also signifies communication in the reversed direction, i.e. from buyers to sellers. (Kotler & Armstrong 2012, 52, 53.)

## 2.2 Understand organizational buyers

Business buyers may purchase a product or service to resell it, as the case of wholesalers and retailers, or to use in their production of other products which are sold to others afterwards. Although the core principles of business-to-business and business-to-consumer marketing are more or less similar, both to develop a solution for the buyer's problems, generate and communicate the value offered to differentiate from that of competitors, there are considerable contrasts between them in terms of market structure and demand, nature of the buying unit, and the decision process (Table 1).

*Table 1 Characteristics of Business Market (Kotler & Armstrong 2012, 167.)*

Market Structure and Demand	Business markets contain fewer but larger buyers. Business buyer demand is derived from final consumer demand. Demand in many business markets is more inelastic—not affected as much in the short run by price changes. Demand in business markets fluctuates more and more quickly
Nature of the Buying Unit	Business purchases involve more buyers. Business buying involves a more professional purchasing effort.
Types of Decisions and the Decision Process	Business buyers usually face more complex buying decisions. The business buying process is more formalized. In business buying, buyers and sellers work more closely together and build close long-term relationships.

Business market comprises fewer and larger buyers, whose demand is actually derived from end-user demand. As a result, not only do business-to-business marketers have to be aware of their customers but also pay close attention to the situation of their customer's customers (Fill 2011, 75). In addition, since a small change in demand of final consumer might lead to a significant change in business product demand, it could also be described as fluctuating demand (Kotler et al. 2012, 297). Meanwhile price change usually has minor effect on demand for business products, especially in the short run. As illustrated by Kotler et al. (2012, 297), "shoe manufacturers are not going to buy much more leather if the price of leather falls, nor will they buy much less leather if the price rises, unless they can find satisfactory substitutes".

As compared to consumer market, business purchases are influenced by more people and conducted in a much more professional manner. They affect the wellbeing of the entire organization, involving higher risks, especially major ones. Therefore, business purchases require careful evaluation and rational purchasing policies, and are usually decided in the participation of many experts in technical, economical, purchasing and even logistic issues. (Kotler et al. 2012, 296.)

Likewise, the decision process is more complex by interacting with more people, with the involvement of a larger sum of money, and the necessity to have certain technical knowledge about product. It is also conducted through a more formalized procedure including business meetings, negotiation, careful management over terms of contract, and written purchase orders. (Arens et al. 2011, 199.) Most importantly, the high involvement level of business product means organizational buyers often have more power in the purchase than individual ones. In fact, buyers and seller are mutually dependent, leading to the need to establish a close and long-term relationship between them. (Kotler et al. 2012, 295.)

### **The buying center**

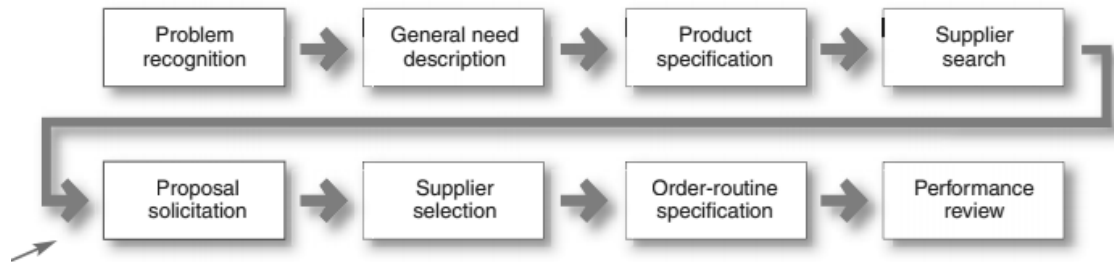
The decision-making unit of a buying organization, called the buying center, is formed by everyone who directly involves or influences the decision-making process. There are six roles forming the structure of the buying center, including:

1. Initiators: who request the purchase of something,
  2. Users: who need the product to perform their job,
  3. Influencers: who provide advice or consultation about the purchase,
  4. Deciders: who decide on the requirements of product and vendors,
  5. Buyers: who are in charge of selecting suppliers and negotiating over purchase terms,
  6. Gatekeepers: who control two-way information flow between the buying center and sellers.
- (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 92.)

It is important to note that one person can occupy more than one role, as well as it is also possible for many people to take the same role. They can also be from outside the organization, such as consultants or technical specialists. A typical figure for the number of members in a buying center is five or six. They tend to have different criteria, level of influence, and authority over the buying decision. These individuals share the risks associated with the decision, acting

for the same goal of contributing to their organization's wellbeing. However, at the same time, each of them has their own motivation and perception about the success of the purchase, for example, recognition, advancement, and feeling of achievement. (Kotler et al. 2012, 302.)

### Buying situation and process



*Figure 2 The Business Buying Process (Kotler & Armstrong 2012, 176.)*

A typical organizational buying process starts with personnel in an organization recognizing a problem that can be solved by obtaining a certain product. This recognition might be stimulated from both internal and external factors (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 93). An example for internal stimuli is the demand for new materials in new product development, whereas external stimuli can be illustrated with the case when the organization receive a sales call which offer better product at a cheaper price (Fill 2011, 77).

After the problem has been identified, the next step is to prepare a general need description which outlines expected features of product and estimated quantity, followed by a product specification. This stage is designed to guide the value analysis of the purchase. (Kotler & Armstrong 2012, 177.)

Next, the buyer starts searching for suppliers by utilizing the Internet, advertisement, trade fares, or recommendations (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 95). Electronic marketplaces and the application of e-procurement are becoming more and more popular, shaping the revolution of modern business purchasing. In this stage, it is the duty of marketers to make the supplier appear attractive in the potential list in order to achieve sales prospect. The practice is commonly referred as lead generation. (Kotler et al. 2012, 306-308.)

Qualified suppliers are then invited to present their proposals, which are continued to be evaluated to select a few superior offers into formal presentations. Final supplier is selected

based on a set of criteria about price, reputation, product reliability, service reliability, and supplier flexibility. (Fill 2011, 78.)

Afterwards, the chosen supplier and the buyer work together at the stage of order-routine specification, when the contract are formed with detailed technical features, quantity, expected delivery time, return policies, warranties, and so on. Also the routine for next time purchase, or maintenance, repair, and operations items if applicable is set up to establish procurement efficiency. (Kotler & Armstrong 2012, 178.) Last but not least, supplier performance is reviewed periodically to ensure mutually advantageous purchase, update the solution, and terminate the relationship with supplier if necessary (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 95).

Some stages in this process can be skipped depending on buying situations. Straight rebuy is when the buying process is simplified the most since the buying tasks are only specification of product and performance review with the same products the company has had experience with from previous purchase. (Kotler et al. 2012, 305.) In the case of modified rebuy, which occurs when the company wants to alter purchase terms, additional involvement of both sides and there are possible opportunities for new suppliers (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 98). Meanwhile, all steps in the buying process must take place in the case of new task, i.e. a buyer is buying a product for the first time, presenting more risk and thus more participants (Fill 2011, 76).

### **2.2.1 Purchasing practice**

The selection of supplier is determined by a set of choice criteria. As mentioned above, the buying center in an organization contains different members with different responsibilities and benefits. Therefore, it is likely for choice criteria to reflect criteria used to evaluate performance of these members, and the weight of each factor depends on the authority and influence level of the individual in the DMU (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 95).

In organizational buying practice, common choice criteria can be classified into two types: functional and psychological. Some examples for the former are productivity, delivery, life-cycle cost, reliability, durability, technical assistance and safety (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 96). No matter whether products purchased by business customers are resold or used to support their operations, consistent performance of the items has a critical impact on the buyers' wellbeing. As

a result, many organizations are resistant to trade quality for price, and indeed expect the purchased components to be reliable, durable, and preferably upgradable to reduce inspection, maintenance and replacement costs, especially for those with long-term usage. (Weele 2014, 75.) In addition, the term quality also goes beyond transacted products to indicate the competency of supplier, such as the ability to deliver professional augmented services and minimize the risk of supply disruption (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 97).

On the other hand, office politics, personal risk, reciprocity, and pleasure are several elements of emotional criteria in supplier selection. When involving in a purchasing decision, members of the DMU may face the personal fear of criticism or of damaging status. Selecting familiar or reputable suppliers and multiple sourcing is some common solutions for perceived risks (Weele 2014, 77). Besides, intuitive factors such as the preference over a salesperson can also affect the final choice. Jobber and Lancaster (2009, 97) suggest that salespeople might change their sales presentation depending on the member of DMU they are dealing with in order to gain favorable attitude. For instance, a discussion with a financial officer should emphasize the superiority in economical aspects, while more focus is put on the technical excellence of the product when the salesperson is talking with a production engineer.

Understanding of contemporary purchasing practices is crucial to execute the marketing function of the supplier firms. One trend to be noticed is centralized purchasing, which convenes common requirements of different local operating units to a single central buying task. This approach enables long-term relationship between buyers and sellers and allows buying specialists to possess more influence level by developing purchasing expertise in concentrated groups of products. As a result, the selling organizations are given a hint to identify and allocate their effort on important people of the buying center. (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 102.)

System purchasing is applied when an organizational buyer acquires the entire solution to a problem from one supplier to reduce procurement and management costs as well as purchasing risks. In system purchasing, suppliers not only respond to the demand of buyers but also get involved in the earlier stage to together figure out optimal solutions for the buyers' need. (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 103.) Selling firms can take advantages of this practice by adopting system contracting as a marketing tool such as providing the total requirement of MRO – maintenance, repair, operating – supplies (Kotler et al. 2012, 300).



The concept of reverse marketing conveys purchasing in an opposite direction than suppliers offer their solutions to organization in need. Instead of passively receiving and evaluating the suitability of different proposals, buyers can negotiate with suppliers to obtain exactly what they want for a solution (Kotler et al. 2012, 165). This approach enables sellers to build even stronger and longer lasting relationship with customers as well as give them an insight of customer practical demand to innovate their products, which then can attract other customers (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 103).

Another familiar option in organizational buying is that a firm consents to lease a product for a certain time period instead of outright buying. Leasing takes place in two major forms: financial lease and operating lease. The former is in longer term with complete amortization over the lease term, while in the latter, the contract is in shorter duration, cancellable, and not fully amortized (Weele 2014, 76). An organization who offers leasing options have to take into account several marketing issues, including net present value, tax advantages, and spreading payment solution of leasing versus buying to customers, the level of promotion place on each option, and the demonstration of other customer benefits (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 104).

### **2.2.2 Customer relationship management (CRM)**

Interactions of buyers and sellers during a purchasing process form between them certain relationships with nature varying in terms of quality, durability, and the interdependence level of the two parties. Despite the fact that business buying practice is a rational approach with emphasis placed on products and price, the role of the relational element is still indispensable (Fill 2011, 189). The act of conducting purchasing tasks with existing suppliers reduces the risks for customers, provides sellers with somewhat guaranteed sources of revenue, and saves time and efforts for both sides (Jobber & Lancaster 2009, 105). From the perspective of selling firms, the costs to gain new customers are higher than to retain the current ones, let alone the costs of losing customers such as the waste of lifetime customer value and negative word-of-mouth. Moreover, loyal customers are such valuable assets for a business as their willingness to re-buy more frequently, pay premium price, and generate positive word-of-mouth increases in accordance with their engagement with the company. Therefore, it is undoubtedly better-off to build a long lasting relationship with customers. (Arens et al. 2011, 270.)

The concept of relationship marketing develops beyond transactional marketing to create, maintain, and strengthen long-term relationships with customers and other stakeholders by exchanges of things in mutual value (Kotler et al. 2012, 977). There are five levels of relationships between a company and its stakeholders. Basic transactional relationship excludes any post-purchase follow-up, whereas reactive relationship is when buyers are encouraged to contact the company about any problems after their acquisition of products. Accountable relationship represents the case when the selling firm actively contacts buyers to examine and consolidate customer satisfaction, gathering feedback to improve its offering. Meanwhile, a relationship is considered as proactive if the seller does even more by occasionally suggesting existing customers about its new solutions. Above all, partnership is the closest type of relationship where the two parties collaborate in finding solutions at mutual benefits. (Arens et al. 2011, 271.)

The development toward a relationship-oriented business requires a marketing strategy based on CRM. At strategic level, the company must broaden its vision to compete on its marketing offering as a whole, including not only transacted products but also any accompanied services throughout the entire customer-interacting process. Accordingly, CRM is closely linked with service marketing, where the firm creates partnerships and strives for a well-established network to manage its service process. From this strategic base, there are three main tactical elements of a competitive relationship marketing plan, including the acquisition of direct contacts with customers, the establishment of customer database, and a systematic implementation of customer understanding in marketing. (Grönroos 2010, 27.)

Marketing communications play a crucial role in CRM, contributing in the formulation of experience and impressions at each stage of the buying process. The trust of customers on a company is based on not only performance and accountability but also familiarity and reputation, which are achieved by effective marketing communication efforts. (Fill 2011, 202.) The context of ongoing relationships requires relationship dialogs between two parties in order to gain mutual understanding and collaborate in finding solutions for their common goals. Relationship-oriented communications involve devoted participation of both parties in listening and discussing instead of only the company talking and the customer supposed to listen. However, even two-way communication processes is still far from enough to form relationship marketing if they take place through distinct media. Planned communications have to integrate with the communication aspects of the interaction process in order to evoke the motivation of engagement in customers. (Grönroos 2010, 278-281.) Indeed, as the management focus of integrated marketing

communications (IMC) is the interdependence in marketplaces, which happens to represent the nature of relationship, it is agreeable to say that IMC actually enable relationship marketing. (Arens et al. 2011, 272.)

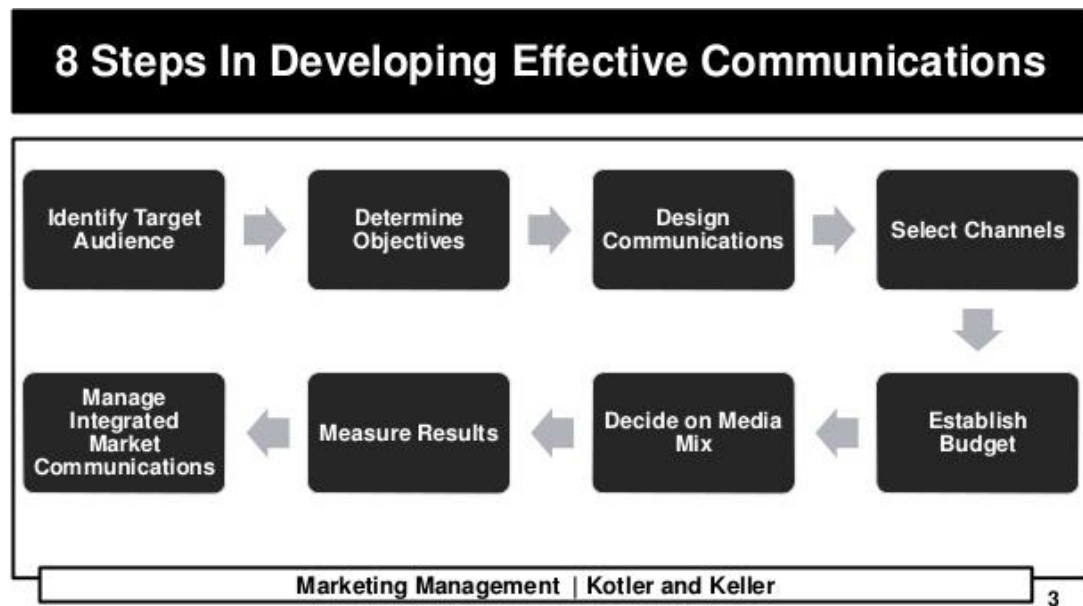
## **2.3 Marketing communication**

Successful marketing requires more than just a good product, an attractive price, and making it available for purchase. It is also crucial for the company to communicate its value to its target customers, so they can actually know how good the product is, how attractive the price is, and so on. Fill (2011, 5) has defined marketing communication as “an audience-centered activity which attempts to encourage engagement between participants and provoke conversations”. In other words, the purpose of marketing communications is to inform, persuade and remind customers as well as evoke preference and reassure them about the brand they market (Kotler et al. 2012, 776).

The fundamental forms of marketing communication comprise traditional mass media advertising, online advertising, personal selling, public relation, events and sponsorship, sales promotion such as discount or coupons, direct marketing via both online and offline means such as postal catalog, email, and text message, and numerous other communication tools (Shimp 2010, 7).

### **2.3.1 Marketing communication planning process**

Effective marketing communication requires complex planning since there are a large variety of communication tools to decide and diverse types of audience with dynamic responses to any marketing efforts. In order to establish a comprehensive marketing communication plan, marketers must deliberate all the aspects of communication, which could be summed up in the Lasswell model: “Who say What to Whom in Which Channel with What Effect?” (Fill 2011, 33.) The model suggested by Kotler et al. (2012, 782) has listed eight major steps in marketing communication planning (Figure 3), which are meant to eventually give a valid answer to each of the elements in that question following a systematic approach.



*Figure 3 Marketing communication planning process (Mathur 2014, cited 26.03.2016.)*

The identification of audience is the initial step for any followed marketing communication decisions. Corresponding to strategic marketing decision over target customers, marketing communication directs to current users and potential buyers of the company's products as well as who can have influence on them (Kotler et al. 2012, 782). Besides, Shimp (2010, 22) suggests the determination of brand position at this stage in order to ensure that not only are targeting decisions made with respect to how brands are intended to be positioned, but planned positioning is also appropriate to generate favorable outcomes within the target groups.

The next step involves setting communication objectives, from general level to specific level, long-term and short-term effects. Whether it is customer acquisition or customer retention, each marketing communication practices must be clearly given the measurable results that they are supposed to achieve. (Shimp 2010, 22.) Commonly, companies determine multiple objectives for their marketing communications (Kotler et al. 2012, 783).

In the third stage, designing the communications, there are three dimensions that have to be planned, including "what to say, how to say it, and who should say it". The content of the message, i.e. appeals, theme, or ideas play an important role in not only shaping corporate image but also act as the attraction point to draw audience attention. (Fill 2011, 376.) The manner to express the message, for example language, dialects, and etiquette, should be suitable to the

target groups, and whether it is said on behalf of the company or an opinion leader also affect the interpretation of audience (Kotler et al. 2012, 783-789).

The fourth stage of the planning process calls for the selection of communication channels, which can excellently reach target audience. There are personal and non-personal channels (Kotler et al. 2012, 789). Personal communication channels, such as face-to-face, telephone, and email, are advantageous in its nature of customized presentation and feedback possibility. On the other hand, sales promotions, events, and public relations, which are examples of non-personal channels, can address to a larger number of message receivers. (Fill 2011, 16.)

Next, the total marketing communications budget should be established. Budgeting is one of the most important marketing communication decision as spending too much certainly means a waste of resources, whereas too little budget will prevent the sales function to reach its potentials. In order to avoid setting insufficient and excessive budget, a company has to be aware of its available resources, objectives, and competitive level in the markets (Shimp 2012, 166). Affordable method can be an option although it might results from a bias decision failing to see over financial factors. Another option is setting budget as a certain percentage of past or estimated future sales. This method is one of the dominant budgeting methods in addition to objective-and-task method. (Kotler et al. 2012, 793-794.) For the approach that usually appears to be the most sensible and defensible, objective-and-task method, specific tasks are dictated to achieve tactical-level objectives and the total budget is calculated by summing up the estimated amount of financial resources required to perform each task (Shimp 2012, 170).

The sixth phase deals with deciding on the marketing communication mix, which consists of eight major modes of communication: advertising, sales promotion, events and experiences, public relation and publicity, direct marketing, interactive marketing, word-of-mouth marketing, and personal selling (Kotler et al. 2012, 777). There are several factors to consider when arranging the media mix. Firstly, different types of market are appealed to distinct communication platforms. For example, in business-to-business market, the use of sales call is often believed to be more rational than advertising. Secondly, the effect of each communication tool differs between buyer readiness stages. A person who has bought a product will response in a dissimilar way to that product ad than one who has been unaware of the product until then. Lastly, which stage the product is in its life cycle also determines the cost effectiveness of different marketing communication tools. (Kotler et al. 2012, 798-800.)

After the plan is implemented, the result of the marketing communication effort, i.e. its impacts on target audience, should be measured. Marketers may use questionnaire or interview to discover the awareness and attitude of target audience members regarding the product or the brand. Furthermore, detecting the change in behavior of the target groups toward the marketed items, such as buying them or talking about them, is definitely helpful in evaluating marketing communication outcomes. (Kotler et al. 2012, 800.)

The final step of the process is managing integrated marketing communications to achieve brand consistency across all selected channels. Shimp (2010, 26) has demonstrated the establishing of marketing communication momentum, which meant to sustain every single implemented effort in order to continually contribute to marketing communication outcomes. The practice of integrated marketing communication emphasizes that chosen promotional tools have to be well coordinated with each other, unite all of the separate messages, thus maximizing as well as prolonging the total outcome (Kotler et al. 2012, 801). The later chapter of this paper is going to discuss the concept of integrated marketing communication in further detail.

### **2.3.2 Integrated marketing communication (IMC)**

The recent decades have experience a dynamic transformation of the marketing communication environment. Indeed, there are three pivotal shifts that drive modern marketers to change the way they communicate with customers. Firstly, customers are far more empowered than they used to be thanks to the ease of access to information. (Shimp 2012, 9.) Whenever they want to know something, they can proactively check information available on the Internet, not only from the company-owned sources, but also from the press, the community, or other users, instead of relying solely on what the salesperson provides. Secondly, the development of technology has given birth to a variety of new marketing channels connecting businesses and customers almost any time in any place. Smart phones, tablets, Wi-Fi, 3G, 4G, social network sites with highly interactive features, and browser cookie, etc. have enabled marketers to convey more personalized messages as well as made it possible for customers to send their feedback (Kotler et al. 2012, 409). Finally, a significant revolution could be seen in modern marketing strategies when differentiation has taken the dominant position from mass marketing (Kotler et al. 2012, 411). Believing that “different people want different things”; companies often modifies their

marketing mix to suit specific groups of customers. All of these changes lead to a marketing communications practice which must be more miscellaneous but unified at the same time.

Fragmented markets where each target group has unique characteristics and preferences require diversified communication approaches. However, the way marketers differentiate between message sources and the way audiences do have little in common. Various pieces of information audiences receive whether from website, commercial ads, or other consumers' reviews will form in their mind only one overall picture about the brand. If there is any conflict among the messages delivered via these channels, audience will be confused about brand image and corporate position. (Fill 2011, 122.) Therefore, the need for an integration of all marketing communication methods is inevitable. Importantly, IMC recognizes the added value in harmonized combination of various marketing communication disciplines, or in other words, "the entity is bigger than sum of the parts" (Kytta 2015, 23).

Successful implementation of IMC can bring substantial competitive advantages to a company in terms of reinforced brand position, efficiency, and effectiveness. It consolidates the trustworthiness of the brand as what stated via company-owned sources is consistent with that from other so-call objective sources. Besides, IMC requires different functions of a company to collaborate closely, sharing available assets and optimizing individual strengths. Duplications of marketing efforts are also eliminated in such a streamline process, thus saving resources for the business. (Kotler et al. 2012, 802.) The effectiveness of IMC is proven when customers, who are driven through multiple stages of the buying process with a steady brand position, are likely to put preference, make a purchase, and develop relationships with the brand (Arens et al. 2011, 595).

Importantly, all of the above mentioned benefits only result from a truly integrated marketing communication programme, which requires five key features (Shimp 2012, 10). Firstly, IMC is customer-oriented. Correctly understanding of customer needs and offering values matching those needs are fundamental in any marketing activities, including the application of IMC. In addition, customers have control of whether or not they devote attention to marketing communication messages, and if yes, where, when and how they receive them. (Kotler et al. 2012, 803.) A message failing to target the right customer needs and wants will simply be a waste of effort. This also means the reduction in mass media and the adoption of other more adaptive communication approaches. For that concern as well, the second feature of IMC is suggested as using all touch points between a company and customers that must be not only relevant but also

engaging in communicating brand message. The single unification of these multiple messages is the third and obvious requirement of IMC as illustrated in earlier writing. The fourth feature of a IMC program is its ability in building relationships with customer, encouraging repurchase, brand loyalty and positive word-of-mouth. Finally, marketers must remember that the ultimate goal of IMC is always to affect behavior, not only enhancing positive brand awareness and attitudes but also turning them into real profitable actions. (Shimp 2010, 10-19.)

There are four sources of communication messages, namely planned messages, product messages, service messages, and unplanned messages, with certain credible level of each source. Unplanned messages such as word-of-mouth, references, and gossips represent the highest level of creditability, while people are usually skeptical about glossy information provided on commercial ads, brochures, and by salespeople. (Grönroos 2011, 266-267.) The integration of these messages is described in Duncan and Moriarty triangle in Figure 4. Planned messages are what companies say about themselves, which are compared with what they actually do, i.e. their products and services. They are then confirmed by the most believed information sources which are what other say about what the companies say and do. An IMC program is effective when the firm does what it says and others confirm that it keeps its promises. (Arens et al. 2011, 275.)

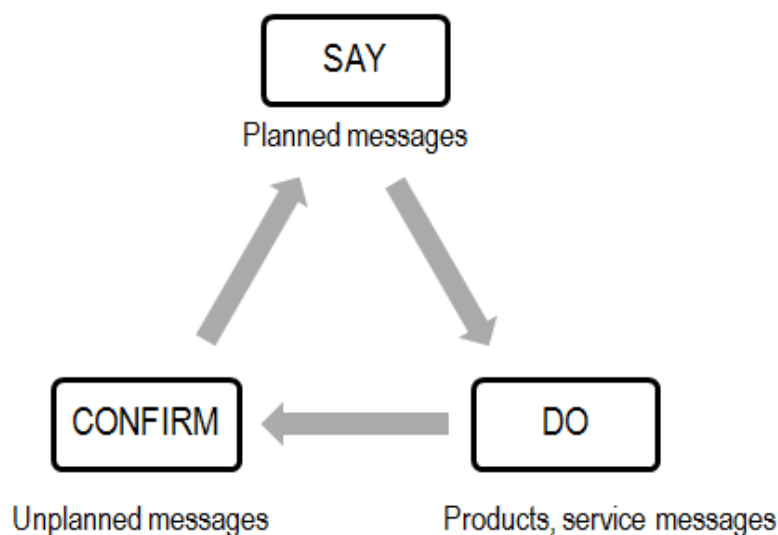


Figure 4 The integration triangle (Arens et al. 2011, 275.)

In practice, according to Kitchen and Burgman (2010, 8), there are four stages of IMC implementation (Figure 5). The first phase is to harmonize marketing communication tactics, i.e. various promotion tools as well as other elements of the marketing mix. In the next stage, the scope of marketing communication is redefined with consideration of all touch points between



target audiences and the firm, collecting and applying extensive customer behavioral data in marketing communication deployment. Moving on to the third step, information technologies are utilized to establish an accessible and well-organized customer database, and more importantly, turn relevant data into useful customer knowledge. Finally, integration is applied at the strategic level, coordinating marketing and finance to generate desirable return on investment.

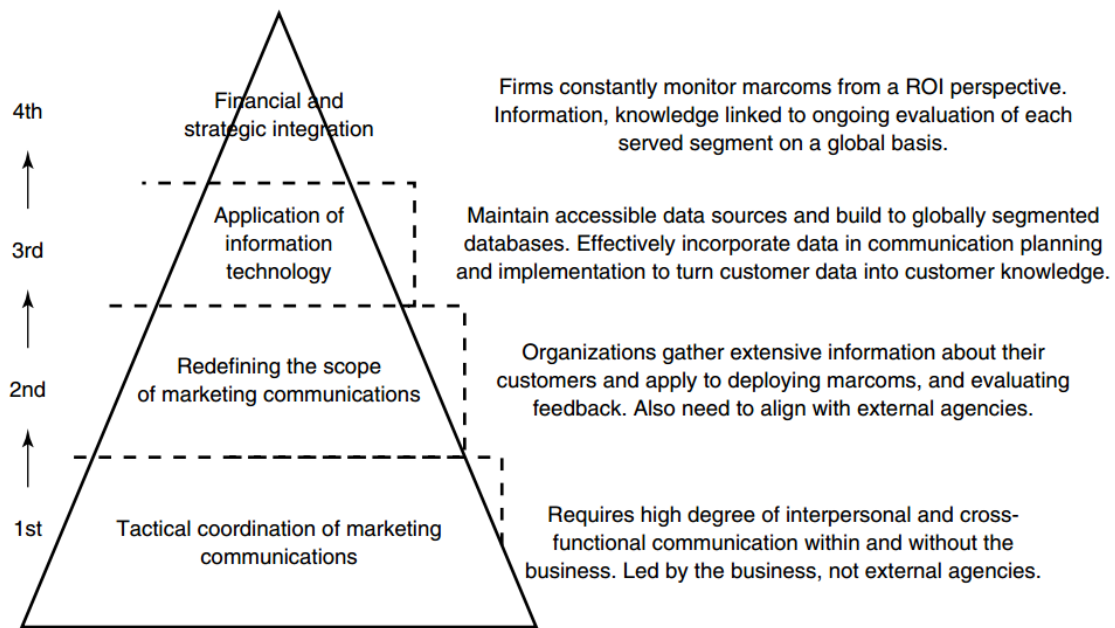


Figure 5 A four stage model (Kitchen and Burgman 2010, 9.)

At the first stage, the program has presented one of the five and also the most obvious feature of IMC: message consistency. Meanwhile, an IMC program in its second stage has started to be customer-oriented and to utilize all contact points. Most companies in the last decades were said to bound at this stage because they failed either to recognize the strong bond between marketing, research, and finance, or to overcome obstacles preventing them from coordinating these business functions. (Kitchen and Burgman 2010, 10.)

## 2.4 Digital marketing communication (DMC)

The term digital marketing and e-marketing are used interchangeably to signify the management and implementation of marketing where digital media such as www page, electronic mail, and mobile technology are utilized together with a collection of electronic data and software applications (Kotler et al. 2012, 131). Essentially, businesses employ digital marketing as an

integrated part of their thorough marketing function. It can be said that modern technologies have facilitated marketing to be done on an advanced level.

However, in order to make effective use of those technological advancements, marketers must acquire comprehensive understanding about them. Kotler et al. (2012, 132) have suggested available technology nowadays to be considered from two points of view, information and interaction perspectives. Information technology (IT) deals with collecting, researching, analyzing, organizing, and controlling information. These might include, for example, data collection systems, data storage system, accessing tools to database, software that assists in arranging information into relevant and well-timed knowledge. Thanks to IT information processing can now be accomplished in much higher speed, larger scale and economically. (Jobber 2009, 362.) Meanwhile, from the perspective of interaction, technologies have supported customers and businesses in how they communicate, create and maintain relationships, and collaborate with others, such as the Internet, email, mobile communications, social networking sites, interactive products, and self-service technologies. Therefore, relationships between customers and companies are enabled to grow on an interactive level, promising to be stronger and longer-lasting. (Arens et al. 2011, 524.)

#### **2.4.1 Digital marketing strategy**

The capability of the internet is massive in not only broadening the coverage of marketing activities but also narrowing its focus on target customers at the same time. In order to optimize it, a digital marketing strategy is essential to focus marketing efforts on relevant aspects to the business. (Ryan & Jones 2009, 19.) The formulation of a cohesive digital marketing strategy requires sufficient understanding of digital environment and the power of digital tools, plenty of research, critical analysis, and rational but innovating decisions. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 190.)

Before stepping in the online world, marketers need to acknowledge the possible scope of digital marketing in their businesses, or in other words, to what extent digital media can be applied in a company's overall marketing communications. Apparently, different companies operate in different industries and target different types of customers, thus representing various levels of digital technology adoption. Although the resources a company has are also effectual, there are

two main questions when it comes to application of digital media in marketing: “Are its customers online or going to be online?” and “To what extent its products or brands suitable to the online environment, from being advertised online to sold online?” Any digital marketing decisions should be relevant to these two aspects. (Ryan & Jones 2009, 20-22.)

Digital marketing strategy is developed following three stages: defining the online opportunity, selecting the strategic approach, and delivering results online. The main focus of the first stage is a set of clear e-marketing objectives, which should be shared throughout the company. It also involves measuring present e-marketing performance and evaluating both micro and macro e-marketplaces. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 25.) As mentioned earlier, each business differs in its ability to embrace digital marketing. It is needed for marketers to have clear understanding of the facilities, knowledge, and skills they already have, what should be acquired and what should not due to the comparative between costs and benefits. Besides, the same technology that allows businesses to reach their customers beyond geographical borders also bring them competitors from a global scale, placing them in a much complex competitive world. (Ryan & Jones 2009, 23.)

When mentioning digital customers, it should be clear that there is no separation between online and offline customers. A prospect on a corporate website has the same need with the one who visit its brick-and-mortar store. The term understanding digital customers actually means to learn how they behave online in order to better reach and satisfy them using digital tools. (Ryan and Jones 2009, 26.) Firstly, they are knowledgeable with the channels they are using, knowing where to find the information they want and ignore the irrelevant instead of carefully absorbing all the things presented on their browser window. The requirement of speed and interaction is also typical. As the development of web 2.0 provides customers with more power of control, they are no longer receptive but also actively communicate their own opinions either to the company or to the public. (Arens et al. 2011, 531.)

Regarding digital marketing objectives, the functions of any online marketing activities are said to fall into three categories: brand development, revenue generation, and customer support. Online sales, lead generation, and direct marketing are some examples of the direct contribution in revenue, while the online presence of a company also aims at increasing brand awareness and trust in complement to its offline efforts. (Charlesworth 2014, 32).

Based on the results of the initial stage, the business determines what values it can offer to customers at a profit and decides the digital marketing communication mix to deliver that value proposition (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 25). The scope of marketing strategy covers many aspects, which can be summarized in five factors (5Ms): markets (target audiences), money (budget), media – the selection of communication vehicles and the creation of communication messages, mechanics, and methodology – the planning of message size, style, frequency, and duration. (Arens et al. 2011, 318-319.)

When the e-marketing plan is put into action, such as building the website, launching an email campaign, or placing online advertisements, the integration with traditional marketing must always be ensured. Online performance is frequently assessed; data over customer profile, experience, and behavior is gathered and effectively utilized in continuously improving e-marketing performance. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 26.)

Figure 6 illustrates the application of digital marketing to influence customers throughout the buying process. Corresponding to the movement of buyers through the four stages of exploration, decision making, purchase, and advocacy, we can see the roles of each digital tool in reaching, acting, converting, and engaging customers. A digital marketing strategic plan coordinates those different tools, creates content, and designs the online presence to pull customers towards the company. (Bosomworth 2012, cited 26.03.2016.) A customer with interests in certain products is lead to the company web page via search engines, social networks, or other publicity. When the website is explored, marketing efforts are focused on developing useful and inspirational content, interaction, and reminder in order to convert visitors' initial interests into profitable benefits such as positive brand attitudes and purchase intention. Engagement with customers after sales fulfills their satisfaction with the purchase decision, encouraging positive word-of-mouth and repeat purchase. (Kytta 2015, 16.)

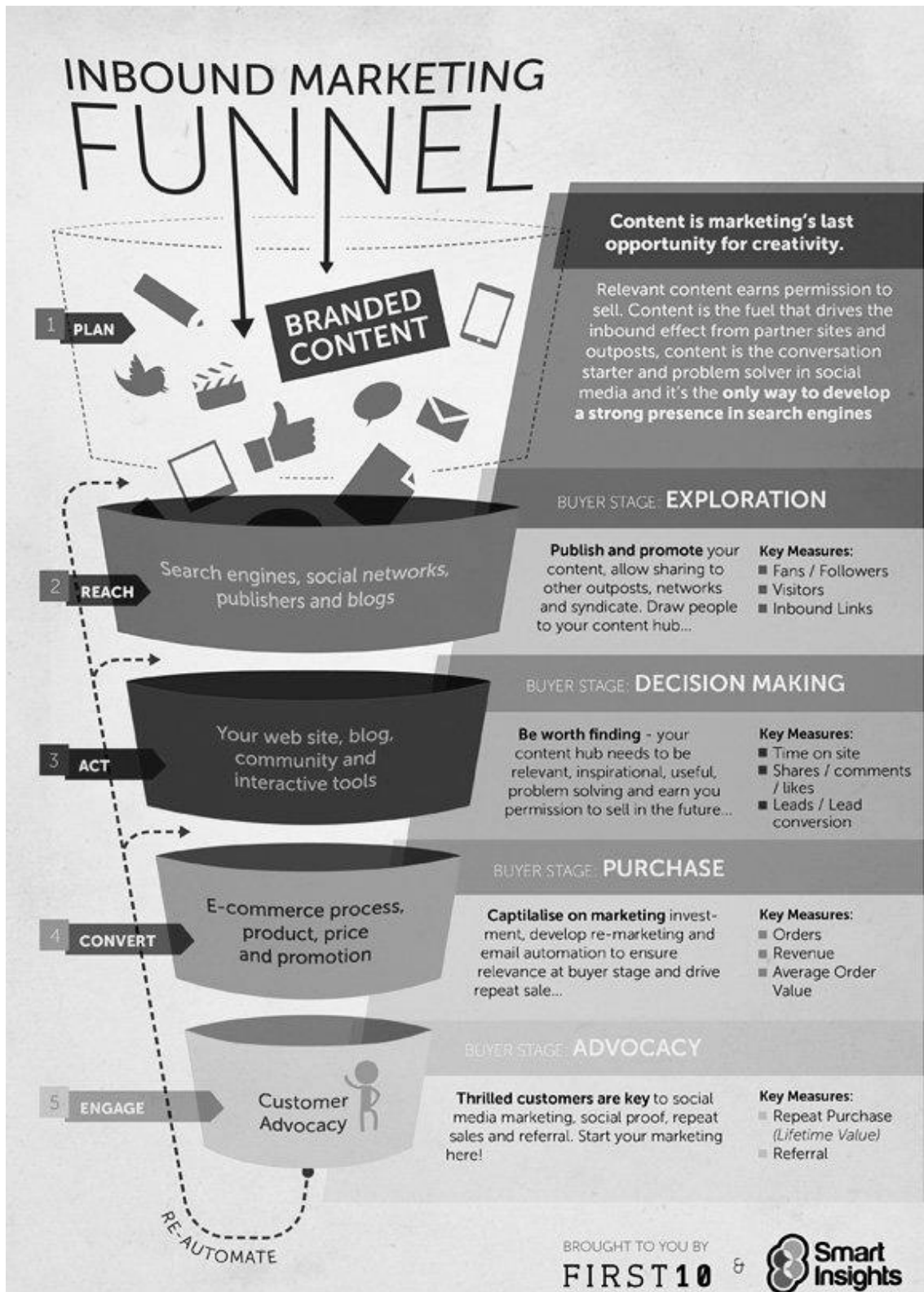


Figure 6 Inbound marketing funnel (Bosomworth 2012, cited 26.03.2016.)

Content marketing is no longer a new concept in marketing strategy; however, in this digitalized world, it has been a remarkable trend and even been recommended as the most effective online

marketing approach (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 44). The concept is defined as the informative and relevant use of text, rich media, audio, and video content on print and digital channels for the purpose of attracting and retaining target audience (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 653). Since people nowadays are surrounded by a huge amount of information, unless the online presence of a company is worthy for them to spend time on, it will be ignored. Effective employment of content marketing is believed to stimulate demand without actually selling, build trust and positive brand image, closely engaging with customers throughout their buying process, thus likely to generate profit in the long run. (Fill 2011, 376.)

Successful implementation of content marketing is achieved with a number of criteria. Firstly, the knowledge delivered has to be useful to cause audience truly read and think about. A person without purchase intention will probably pay no attention to selling messages appeared on posters, newspapers, or on his phone and computer to save himself from being information overloaded. Meanwhile, a useful and frequently updated content represents an effort of marketers in delivering to their customers more informative value, thus deserved to acquire their attention as a reward. (Fill 2011, 376.) The second success factor is appropriate presentation, whether via which media, i.e. TV, radio or newspaper, or in the forms of text, image, audio or video. A content presented in an appealing way to target audience will be convenient for audience to acquire, stand out from other competitors, and associate with brand image. Besides, a preferred feature of allowing participation such as commenting, rating and reviewing also enriches the content and improves credibility, bringing an advantage in customer engagement. Overall, a good management of content offers greater value to customers, thus deserving their preference, action, and positive word of mouth. (Charlesworth 2014, 108-124.)

#### **2.4.2 Digital marketing channels**

A crucial part of e-marketing strategy is to decide on which digital tools to use among a wide range of digital marketing channels available. The most considerable digital marketing channels are categorized into six types, namely search engine marketing, online public relation, online partnership, display advertising, opt-in-email marketing, and social media marketing. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 29.) As each tool presents certain advantages and drawbacks, they shall be discussed more in the following subchapters, focusing on B2B perspective.

## **Website**

A corporate website is considered as a powerful tool in digital marketing. In the digital world with so much uncertainty and rapid evolvement, the website is which a company possesses full level control of and can carry unlimited amount of information about the company profile, its products and services, and so on (Ryan & Jones 2009, 40). When a corporate website goes online, information about the company becomes widely accessible regardless of time and location, bearing the expectation of visitors as an official site with informative and credible content (Charlesworth 2014, 108).

An effective website must start with a set of clearly-defined purposes. The ultimate goal of a website is to convert traffic into customers or prospects, so everything on the site should always be guided toward it, either directly by product information, calls to action, and other sales-oriented content, or indirectly by motivate repeated visit, yielding adherence, thus building trust (Ryan & Jones 2009, 41). In accordance to this conversion goal, a website function can come in a variety of forms, for example transactional e-commerce, service-oriented relationship-building, brand-building, a portal to other websites, or social networking (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 21-23).

Several success factors of a website include quality of content, usability, accessibility, aesthetics, and effective site promotion strategy. As mentioned earlier in the part of content marketing, content quality is a key factor in attracting visitors to the company's site as well as retaining them. In addition, the website ranking on search engines is also determined by the merit and relevance of the information provided (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 494). Usability, accessibility, and aesthetics are essential characteristics required for a web page to appear captivatingly among those with similar content. However, although all of the above elements will form a good website, similar to a good product which does not sell itself, a good website also requires a good site marketing strategy in order to reach target audience. This could be achieved using both online and offline promotion tools such as search engine marketing, advertising, viral marketing, or events and sponsorship. (Charlesworth 2014, 108-124.)

## **Search engine marketing (SEM)**

Search engines are very popular in the present days, well-known with some main options such as Google, Bing, and Youtube. The foremost mission of search engines is to deliver timely, relevant and high-quality search results to their users. People call on search engines when they are

seeking for a physical or virtual product, service, entertainment, or a brand name. (Charlesworth 2014, 189.) The way these digital tools work is that automated programmes called spiders or bots are used to track hyperlinks and crawl across the page they have found. Information gathered in each page is then stored in a massive database with a link in and out called an index. When a search is requested, these indexes are retrieved and relevant results appear on search engine result pages (SERP) almost immediately. Apparently, the number of results can be numerous, and the quality of result regarding what users are looking for varies among them. Therefore, search engines use their ranking algorithms to assess the quality of each result and place them on SERPs in the order of relevant level. (Ryan & Jones 2009, 69-70.)

Possessed a large amount of users, search engines have become a critical channel for marketers to reach their target audience online, known as search engine marketing (SEM). This digital channel is applied to marketing in two different approaches, namely search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine advertising, both aiming to generate attractive positions for a company in search result pages in order to increase the number of visitors to its own web page. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 490.)

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) focuses on gaining the highest ranking in the natural result lists when search engine users enter a specific range of keywords. The criteria for natural ranking in search engines are numerous and dynamic. In fact, the worldwide search engine giant Google has stated the figure of over 200 factors being examined to raise and degrade the position of a result or even eliminate those appeared as a spam. Although it is unable to summarize all of them, there are two must-known principal factors suggested by Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2012, 494) that determine the rank in search engine results page, including the equivalence between web page content and keywords searched, and the page inbound, i.e. the number of links to the page from other website, also closely associated with the quality of those sites. Apart from conforming to these standards, an effective practice of SEO must take into account what kinds of key phrases potential audiences are likely to type into the search box when searching for relevant content to the company online presence. (Ryan & Jones 2009, 73-83.)

SEO offers a number of great advantages as well as some certain disadvantages. On one hand, this low-cost marketing tool can generate significant traffic to the company site if it is done properly. Notably, these visitors can be said to be qualified due to high purchase intention since they have actively searched for a particular product (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 495).



However, on the other hand, SEO is claimed as being lack of predictability and time-consuming for desirable results to be achieved. In addition, the nature of SEO is complex and dynamic as search engine providers hardly publish their weighting criteria, leaving marketers' efforts remain without a direct correlation between their actions and the results. (Ryan & Jones 2009, 91.)

Apart from the organic listings, a search engine results page also displays ad relevant to the searched terms. The use of this sponsor listing is known as search engine advertising, with different paid options such as pay-per-click, pay-per-action, or pay per thousand impressions (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 500-501). Although paid search marketing obtains the presence of a company site on search result pages by paying, it is not necessary that a large amount of bid will determine a high position. Indeed, click-through rate and the quality score of the link, which is achieved by ad text relevance, keyword similarity, landing page content, etc., are also taken into account. (Ryan & Jones 2009, 90.)

This marketing tool surpasses its unpaid counterpart in terms of technical simplicity and good accountability, as it is possible for return on investment (ROI) for each keyword to be calculated. Furthermore, payment is made only when a searcher actually visit the site by clicking the ad instead of bearing all the costs for ad displaying even without attention like traditional marketing. Paid search marketing is also highly targeted and enables remarketing using cookies to detect and target potential customers based on their search history. (Ryan & Jones 2009, 91.) Nevertheless, several major drawbacks of this tool are being competitive and expensive, incompatible lifetime value with the some certain types of products, the requirement of specialist knowledge to deal with configuration, bidding, and different ad networks, time-consuming management process, and might be irrelevant (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 502).

### **E-public relation**

Public relation (PR) is a popular tool among the marketing communication mix. Reputation of a company is resulted from its own perceivable activities and publicized opinion of other towards that business. Public relation, both online and offline, strives to manage reputation for the hope of increasing awareness, causing public attention, and having influence on opinion and behavior in a desirable way for a company. (Kotler et al. 2012, 835.)

The online form of this communication tool takes advantage of the network effect of the Internet to indirectly spread favorable messages about a company, a brand, or a product, while also minimize undesirable mentions, forming a positive image in the mind of the public. Typically, e-PR includes disseminating business profile through online channels, monitoring conversations affecting brand reputation, encouraging advocates and minimizing the impacts of detractors, identifying and influencing online trends in the industry, and linking publicity with the other marketing communication campaigns. (Ryan & Jones 2009, 178.)

Unlike traditional PR, e-PR involves two-way communication between audiences and the organizations as well as between audiences themselves. In addition, audiences of online PR can access to other source of information and have the power to decide on their information intake. These differences present not only opportunities but also challenges for marketers managing PR. Since public relation plays a vital role in the confirm angle of the communication integration triangle, the positiveness of information provided via this channel is critical to build brand equity. Meanwhile, the complex nature of the online environment causes more difficulty in controlling what is shared among the public. Fast response is also required as information travels in even higher speed in the virtual world. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 505-507.) On the other hand, the online environment offers a wider range of options for companies to indirectly influence public opinion such as their own website, blogs, online press, and social media. Effective PR activities are said to have considerable impacts on SEO, affiliate marketing, and social media marketing. (Ryan & Jones 2009, 178-179.)

### **Display advertising**

In display advertising, advertisements are placed on a third-party site at a fee. These ads might appear in the forms of banners and rich media ads, serving the purposes of expanding brand awareness, familiarity, preference, and purchase intent. The process of display advertising usually involves multiples hosting sites, mostly contain topics relevant to what is being advertised, in order to increase visit possibility to the destination site. (Charlesworth 2014, 223.) There are a number of options for purchasing online advertisements, including buying on a specific site, for a specific period, or having the ad placed on the entire site, a section of the site, or depending on searched keywords. In addition to the common payment method of cost-per-thousand (CPM), display advertising can be paid on the basis of results such as click-through or visitor action on destination site. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 520-521.)

Aiming at the goals of delivering content, enabling transaction, shaping attitudes, soliciting response, and encouraging retention, a successful display advertising campaign is advantageous in generating both direct and indirect response from target audiences. A viewer of an online ad might either immediately click through the offer or remember it and visit the site later. Moreover, brand equity is consolidated with rising awareness, positive recognition, precisely targeted. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 522.) As compared to traditional advertising, the digital approach accounts for cheaper payment and more flexible updates (Charlesworth 2014, 223). However, online advertising can be subtracted for its low efficiency if response rate is low, which is likely to occurred in accordance with the common ignorance of web surfers towards ads (Shimp 2010, 398). Also, there is a risk of damaging brand reputation if the hosting sites are associated with unfavorable content such as pornography or gambling (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 524).

### **Email marketing**

Email is a handy medium for business-to-business communications in the forms of direct marketing and customer relationship management. Myriad survey results have revealed that checking email is one of the most common reasons why people go online. Together with its potential of personalization, this channel is predictably appealing to marketers to deploy direct marketing (Charlesworth 2014, 273-285.) However, email advertising is said to some extent as being spoiled since approximately two-thirds of commercial emails represent spam. Not only does a spam message cause annoyance to receiver, but an email categorized as spam also fails its marketing mission. For the benefit of both companies and customers, opt-in email advertising is a form of direct marketing when customers give permission and provide their email addresses for the company they are interested in to send them its offering. (Arens et al. 2011, 549.) However, even in the case of opt-in email, it can happens that customers who have allow companies to send them emails might not be fully aware of what they opt in and end up receiving numerous unwanted emails apart from the topic they are actually interested in (Shimp 2010, 403-404).

Similar to any other marketing communication efforts, the aim of email in marketing can be summed up to two types of achievements: customer acquisition and customer retention. For the purpose of customer acquisition options, marketers may employ cold email campaign using rented lists from email list providers, or co-branded email, which means an email sent on behalf of two brands which are normally correlated with each other. Another option is third-party e-

newsletter, with which a company tries to reach new customers by sponsoring, placing an ad, or posting PR content on a third-party e-newsletter. Meanwhile, the email marketing practices applied to already-acquired email addresses include conversion email, regular e-newsletter, house-list campaign, event-triggered email, and email sequence. Conversion emails focus on turning a customer's interest in the company into actions, whereas regular e-newsletters on the basis of week, month, or quarter are managed to provide customers with up-to-date information about new products and special offers. The acts of inciting trial of service, informing of product launch, or reminding inactivate customers could also be done by different email techniques such as house-list campaign, event-triggered, and email sequence. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 527-529.)

Importantly, there are a number of challenges facing marketers in their email marketing process, namely deliverability, renderability, decline of subscriber's attention, demanding management for the implementation of personalization, and requirement of substantial human and technological resources. Deliverability and renderability are the two most critical factors determining the success of email marketing campaigns. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 531.)

An email campaign is said to be successful if recipients really acquire information provided and favorable responses are provoked. In order to achieve so, email marketing practices have to be creative in both visual and intellectual design, relevant to the needs of target groups, proper timing, containing response-triggered elements, and consistent with other marketing communication efforts. Notably, the integration between the landing page quality and what are expressed in emails is a must. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 532-533.)

### **Social media marketing**

Although the potentials of social media have been experienced more in B2C marketing, this emerging marketing communication tool can also present useful implementation for companies operating in business markets. A B2B firm can optimize such excel features of social media as interactivity, cost-effectiveness, and a wide coverage ability to build its professional connections, raise brand awareness, and support public relations, for example establishing or taking part in a specialist community. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 539, 628.)

Social media communication strategic planning should start with the understanding of target segments before selecting the types of social tools in order to ensure suitability and employ

appropriate engagement techniques. Next, feasible objectives are defined based on rational consideration between commercial benefits versus costs of the chosen media. A clear-defined set of purposes, responsibilities, and allocation of resources are indispensable to directing any corporate activities on social networks. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 536.)

### **2.4.3 Integrated digital marketing communication**

DMC approaches of a business rarely rely on a single channel. As different digital channels have different advantages and disadvantages, not only do marketers need a clear understanding to choose the suitable tools but there is also a necessity to integrate them together as well as with traditional marketing efforts in a way that maximizes desirable results (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 196). Figure 7 illustrates the structure of multiple digital channels, suggesting the core of digital marketing communication is the corporate website. However, a good website alone has minor chance for an Internet user to stumble across it due to the excessive amount of information on the Internet. The users have to learn about the existence of the site somewhere else such as through references, advertising, or search engines. (Ryan & Jones 2009, 66.) The previous parts of this paper have mentioned some of the interdependence of one digital marketing tool on the others, such as a website needs proficient SEO in order to have traffic while the practice of SEO is affected by the website content. Indeed, all channels are interconnected in their massive digital environment. With a rigorous strategy based on careful research and analysis, other communication tools are meant to support the success of the website, aiming at enhancing brand equity, and ultimately at sustainable profitability for the company.



*Figure 7 Structure of digital marketing communication channels (Kutilainen 2013, 23)*

The model suggested by Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2012, 628-629) illustrates a sequential combination of marketing tools for B2B companies to generate lead and optimize conversion. Starting with excelling in search engine techniques, online PR and display advertising, the initial stage focuses on driving visitors to the main website. When customers have been driven to the site, the next goal is to prolong interaction and encourage them to share information via social media by using engagement devices such as whitepapers, other educational materials, and video. In the third stage, visitors are incited to register on the site by offering access to valuable content at permission-based level. As a result, the business is able to obtain their profile information and email addresses. Finally, leads are retained and nourished using regular emails or even phone calls.

#### **2.4.4 Evaluating systems for digital marketing communication**

Any marketing efforts need to be measured so that a company can be clearly aware of how its marketing plan is functioning, whether it is effective or not, and which areas require improvement (Kutilainen 2013, 27). The performance of digital marketing communications is evaluated by systematically acquiring, collating, sorting, analyzing, interpreting and disseminating of

appropriate data. To specify, the process starts from revising what the company wants to achieve with DMC and considering what its online marketing efforts are actually causing. The investigation of the reason why the situation is happening like that provides marketers with a performance diagnosis to then form corrective actions to overhaul mistakes and promote what is being done correctly. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 561.)

Although marketers are equipped with web analytics to keep track on their online audience, the excessive amount of information it provides can get them overwhelmed. Time and resources should be focused on metrics that are truly important. Key performance indicator (KPIs) is a familiar concept in the determination of what information about the current digital status is useful in making strategic decisions. (Ryan & Jones 2009, 119-120.) Some examples of KPIs are click-through rate, conversion rate, page views, bounce rate, abandonment rate, new versus returning visitors, and cost per conversion. These metrics indicate the level of DMC objective accomplishment in terms of the popularity of the website, the ability to attract and retain visitors, the usefulness of each digital tool, and the ability to target the right audiences. (Shimp 2010, 414-415.)

One critical aspect to be measured in DMC evaluation is return on investment (ROI), which gives a snapshot of the profitability of a digital marketing method. ROI for a period is calculated by dividing net profit (return) by the amount of resources devoted (investment) (Kytta 2015, 32). This decision tool is simple to understand even with minimal expertise in economics and financial analysis and essential when consider the efficiency of a marketing effort in collation with the company's financial resources. However, ROI narrow its focus on each individual project in a specific time period while marketing activities also have impacts on each other and generate results in the long run. Marketing communication can be a long term investment, whose results are hardly indicated by ROI. (Novinson 2015, cited 25.03.2016.)

The long term effect of DMC can be assessed by another measurement method called return on marketing investment (ROMI) (Shimp 2010, 52). ROMI represents the contribution of marketing spending to profit, thus taking into account for example the social media mentions of a marketing campaign which appears to generate negligible sales. Therefore, relying on ROMI apart from ROI allows managers to look beyond obvious outcomes the long term effects of marketing activities and that they are more than just business expenses (Economy Watch 2010, cited 19.05.2016).

### **3 SITUATION ANALYSIS**

This chapter is going to put into consideration the current situation of MIT Jsc. and the business environment it is operating in, focusing on digital aspects. This practical understanding will be the base to determine marketing communication objectives and develop suitable digital marketing strategy. The first sub-chapter analyzes operational environment from industrial trends in digital marketing to changing customer demand in the field of high-tech equipment. Next, current marketing practice in MIT Jsc. is studied in detail. Finally, a SWOT analysis is conducted to draw a big picture, matching internal strengths and weaknesses with market opportunities and threats.

#### **3.1 Operational environment**

Vietnam is among 10 countries in Asia with fastest growth in the number of internet users, ranking the third place in South East Asia and eighteenth in the world, making the internet an ideal place to conduct marketing. During the world economic crisis, the domestic economy has also experienced certain difficulties, which revealed to Vietnamese marketers the limit of traditional marketing tools in market expansion and customer relationship management. They realize that digital marketing can be applied to optimize prospects, penetrate into niche markets, and analyze customer behavior to direct advertising efforts to the right groups with the right messages at the right time. (Doanh Nhan Sai Gon Online, cited 05.04.2016.) However, many Vietnamese enterprises are impatient and lack of planning in their implementation of online marketing. Indeed, the ineffectiveness of digital marketing applications into business practice can be attributed to their hesitation and superficial investment. "If Vietnamese companies want to reap success in this field, it is fundamental to invest time, human resources and technology with careful strategic planning". (Nguyen, interview 08.04.2016.)

Although the adoption of digital marketing is rather slower in comparison to the B2C markets, there are several trends which can be highlighted in the development of B2B digital marketing in Vietnam. In 2015, the number of Vietnamese SMEs who agree that a good website is a priority to improve online presence increased by 29 percent as compared to the previous year (Doanh Nhan Sai Gon Online, cited 05.04.2016). If during the last decade, many Vietnamese companies, especially SMEs, deserted their websites, these recent years have witnessed more and more



efforts given in webpage design, content update, and making the pages mobile-friendly (Chong 2014, cited 05.04.2016).

Together with the improvement of website, emphasis has been placed on content marketing with educating posts, storytelling, and product explanation. From the perspective of buyers, 71 percent said they are impressed with companies who invest in video content, and 58 percent thought these companies were more reliable. Not surprisingly, 86 percent of Vietnamese businesses plan to increase their budget in online video marketing in 2016. Research has also shown that 80 percent of decision-making in business comes from reading a series of related articles and social media posts rather than through advertisements. (Nguyen 2016, cited 05.04.2016.) According to Ngo (interview 06.04.2015), e-newspaper sites which are considered as having high credibility among Vietnamese B2B markets are [baodauthau.vn](http://baodauthau.vn), [nhipcaudautu.vn](http://nhipcaudautu.vn), [entrenews.vn](http://entrenews.vn), and [cafebiz.vn](http://cafebiz.vn). Meanwhile, the most popular social medium in both B2B and B2C markets is Facebook with 1,547,280 users, but the use in B2B firms is rather limited compared to their B2C counterparts. LinkedIn, which has become a useful B2B social network tool in many foreign countries, still has not seen much presence of Vietnamese SMEs. (MVF 2011, cited 05.04.2016.)

For search engine marketing, SEO stands out as an advantageous tool since 93 percent of search engine users start with organic listing results. Accordingly, competition among Vietnamese businesses in SEO is growing tremendously, requiring continuous improvement in coordinating marketing efforts. For many years, Google and Google Vietnam have remained as the most popular search engines in the country. (MVF Global 2011, cited 05.04.2016.) In addition, it is common for B2B customers to search for their suppliers in business directory sites, with the most well-known being [doanhnghiep.baohuongmai.com.vn](http://doanhnghiep.baohuongmai.com.vn), [www.vietnambusinessdirectory.com](http://www.vietnambusinessdirectory.com), [www.vietnamtradefair.com](http://www.vietnamtradefair.com), and [vietnamb2bdirect.com](http://vietnamb2bdirect.com) (Trade Forum 2013, cited 05.04.2016).

On the other hand, an upward trend has been seen in the demand for high-tech equipment in the country. After overcoming economic crisis, Vietnamese organizations now have more access to bank loans and also have optimistic vision of their own future, thus willing to make more long-term investments. Investing in modern equipment provides a solution to produce higher quality products with fewer resources (Ngo interview 06.04.2016). Moreover, a part of Vietnamese government development strategy is to modernize and industrialize the national economy. As a result, the two words “industrialization” and “modernization” are emphasized frequently and

strongly in Vietnamese media, creating a psychological need in individuals, who have influence in an organization's DMU, to follow the trend (Nguyen, interview 08.04.2016).

Meanwhile, the availability of this modern equipment in the country is rather limited due to slow development of the domestic technology industry and restricted sales capability of foreign producers in this particular geographical area. Very few technological inventions with sufficient applicability have been made by domestic scientists. Domestic equipment manufacturers are either lack of funding to acquire foreign inventions or find it unprofitable to do so. (Ngo, interview 06.04.2016.) Therefore, there is potential for SMEs like MIT Jsc. to sell foreign equipment which belongs to niche categories to domestic customers. However, the opportunity is seen by not only MIT Jsc. In fact, the appearance of new entrants is considered as a threat to the company, requiring consolidation of its position in the markets.

In Vietnamese business culture, the practice of key account management highly emphasizes the personal aspect of business relationships, i.e. building personal relationships between the company's representatives and individuals in the buyers' decision making unit. As a result, if the contact switch job, which is likely to be in the same industry, it is potential to expand business network with the new account (Nguyen 2016, cited 05.04.2016). Regarding the government market, bureaucracy represents both threats and opportunities from the external environment. Bureaucratic procedures mean that DMU is large and decision-making process is time-consuming, thus higher risk. However, once the connections with key personnel in top authority are built, it is possible for the company to acquire information about new government projects earlier than competitors and have more chance to win the contracts. (Ngo, interview 06.04.2016.)

### **3.2 Company analysis**

Machinery and Informatics Technology Jsc. was found in the year of 2007, which was the peak time of Vietnamese economy during the first decade of the twenty-first century. The company's office is located in Hanoi, whereas members of the sales and engineering teams can move flexibly across the country. Although a large percentage of startups in Vietnam had failed during their first five years, especially with severe impacts of the economic crisis from 2009 to 2012, MIT Jsc. has remained profitable throughout eight years since its establishment. The mission defined by the company's founder, Mr. Ngo Duy Doanh, is to bring advanced solutions to Vietnamese

organizations in both government and private sectors. The process towards this mission includes seeking for available solutions from foreign countries, training high-skilled engineering personnel, and form partnerships with key customers.

Products offered by MIT Jsc. are categorized into four main groups based on their associated knowledge field, including heavy industry equipment, quality inspection equipment, medical equipment, and security equipment. Each category serves one among four major market segments, namely coal mining plants in Quang Ninh, chemical factories, hospitals, and Vietnamese custom in four central cities of Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Hai Phong, and Da Nang. In most of the case, transactions formed with customers from government sector are bigger in both quantity and price than those with private customers. Some specific examples of products are mine ventilation systems, mining explosion-proof detecting devices, Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) systems, 6-color cell phenotype analysis systems, flow cytometry systems, and surveillance systems. The complexity of product components and their usage allows MIT Jsc. to provide associated services such as installment, user training, and MRO (maintenance, repair, and operating). From these features, it can be said that MIT Jsc. is operating in multiple niche markets.

A niche market is a segment with specific customer need which is generally neglected by major competitors (Smart Insights 2015, cited 08.04.2016). The definition of niche market provided by Kotler et al. (2012, 341) suggests the idea of market nichers as “firms that serve small market segments which are not served by larger firms”. Both definitions indicate a strategy to aim at satisfying clearly-defined needs which come in relatively small quantity, which is corresponding to the case of MIT Jsc. Niche market presents low level of competition but must satisfy certain requirements to be a feasible segment. Feasibility of a niche is determined by its accessibility, measurability, and that the size in correlation with possible profit margin must be sufficient to maintain a long-term business (Gordon 2002, cited 08.04.2016).

Challenges of operating in a niche market are the small quantity of prospects as well as the sparse distribution of them. Unlike larger B2B markets, where the number of potential buyers can be thousands, meaning that owning a few percentages of market shares can still sustain the business, B2B market nichers can even list all the names of their target customers. As a result, it is crucial for them to ensure that messages are able to reach the audience groups to raise brand awareness, thus creating more sales opportunities (Orbach 2016, cited 08.04.2016).

Furthermore, since B2B nichers usually rely on a few and high-value contracts, they have to maintain close relationships with these customers, which can be referred to as key accounts. Key account management is a strategy which emphasizes customized efforts in pricing, product and service features, as well as information sharing to satisfy high-potential customers with complex needs (Gallant 2014, cited 08.04.016).

In the case of MIT Jsc., for example, the market for HIV testing equipment like a Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) system is a niche market. The number of prospects within Vietnam for such a product can be quite easy to address to several related hospitals in each province. Similarly, the demand for other products in the company offerings shares this same feature as well. By operating in multiple niche markets, the firm can increase the number of prospects and enable cross-selling. Nevertheless, since a different set of specific technological knowledge is applied to each of these niche markets, targeting new niches requires more resources in term of time, money, and efforts to obtain niche knowledge. A sales team without essential knowledge about medical technology is obviously unable to know what they are selling and what their customer needs are, thus hardly winning the contract. Training staff in this case is an investment, which should be made only if the return is worth it.

Briefly about MIT Jsc.'s business model, there are two ways the company uses to create sales opportunities, i.e. develop or collect information about investment projects for procurement of equipment for loyal customers, and search for new customers in potential segments. When investment projects are confirmed, it quickly identifies products that meet the specifications and collaborates with suppliers to deal with legal conditions, ready to participate in the bidding. The firm prepares those bids to comprise high winning advantages. Once it has won the bid, the next step is to quickly conduct the ordering procedure with suppliers and deploy delivery, installment and handover to ensure the progress of the customers' project and reduce the cost of capital. After sales, frequent contacts with customers via telephone, email, and occasionally business parties are maintained to provide technical supports, reassure customer satisfaction, and develop long-term relationships.

Until now, the main elements of MIT Jsc.'s marketing communications mix are personal selling, direct marketing via telephone and email, and direct references generated by current and past customers. The director of the company believes that these customized efforts of communication have bigger impact on audiences' mind; however, limit the reach of the company to new

prospects across the country (Ngo, interview 06.04.2016). MIT Jsc. has neither had a website nor social network page. Its online presence is seen in few white pages with inadequate information about product range.

The company image is associated with the flexibility in adapting with complex requirements, sensibility in creating win-win situations with buyers as well as the attention to personal goals of DMU members. Besides, the strengths of MIT Jsc. can also be seen in the quality of products from credible manufacturers and its professional staffs, especially high-skilled engineers, most of who rank at the top on headhunter lists in the service engineer sector. The company's human resource consists of diligent employees, who not only have deep understanding of the products and operations but are also devoted to the company's success. Each person is able to perform different kinds of work as well as support the others, thus reducing the cost of regular payroll. Another important asset is the partnerships with customers and government officials, which are always taken care of to maintain and expand. Each individual in the firm is fully aware that high potential relationships are the key to ensure their future well-being status.

### **3.3 SWOT analysis**

SWOT is a useful tool when it is applied to analyze many different circumstances. SWOT is presented in the form of a matrix with 2 rows and 2 columns divided into 4 parts. Each section corresponds to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Strengths are factors within the enterprise which beneficial in achieving business goals. Weaknesses are also internal factors but with negative impacts on the progress. Meanwhile, opportunities and threats are external factors such as market features, society, and government legislations, which either create favorable situations or cause difficulties to the firm. (Berry 2016, cited 10.04.2016.)

It can be seen that the purpose of a SWOT analysis is to identify the strengths the company is holding, where it is standing, as well as the weaknesses that should be remedied. In other words, the tool shows where to attack and where to defend. The outcomes of the SWOT analysis should be applied in a reasonable manner in devising a smart and efficient action plan. (Taylor 2016, cited 10.04.2016.)

Table 2 SWOT Analysis of MIT Jsc.

<p><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong customer relationships</li> <li>• Professional staffs</li> <li>• High quality products from credible manufacturers</li> <li>• Flexibility to adapt with complex customer demand</li> <li>• High credibility in customer care and service performance</li> </ul>	<p><b>WEAKNESSES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No website</li> <li>• Restricted online presence on other channels</li> <li>• Low brand awareness</li> <li>• Limited financial resources</li> <li>• Basic level knowledge about digital marketing tools</li> </ul>
<p><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross-selling</li> <li>• Growing demand in markets for modern equipment</li> <li>• Increasing level of digitalization among Vietnamese organizations</li> </ul>	<p><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New entrants</li> <li>• Small number of prospects</li> <li>• Rising competition in digital marketing environment</li> <li>• Channel conflicts</li> </ul>

## **4 DIGITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS PLAN FOR MIT JSC.**

### **4.1 Digital marketing communications strategy**

This thesis reports digital marketing planning for MIT Jsc., aiming at consolidating the firm's competitive advantages in the online environment, exploiting market trends and turning them into opportunities using digital tools. The situation analysis has given a clear image of the internal and external environment the case company is operating in. This understanding of business capabilities, customers and industry is the foundation to develop an effective marketing plan.

Based on the finding in the previous parts, this chapter of the thesis suggests how MIT Jsc. can apply digital marketing effectively, starting with the matching between the firm's strengths and opportunities in the online context. Then, a clear set of digital marketing communication objectives is determined, followed by a strategic model tailored for MIT Jsc. Next, digital tools are selected and designed to fit with the case and coordinate with each other. Finally, the plan is completed by suggesting how the results can be measured and from which identify room for continuous improvement.

#### **4.1.1 Online value proposition**

The value proposition of MIT Jsc. includes a promising return on investment for its B2B customers and a contribution in their development towards industrialization and modernization. While foreign manufacturers are reluctant to deal with import policies, undergo time-consuming negotiation, and find suitable delivery solutions by themselves to get their products into such a small market, MIT Jsc. help enable the process and provides Vietnamese business buyers with an opportunity to streamline their production process, generate outcomes with high level of precision. Durability of the equipment as well as professionalism of the after-sales services also lower lifetime costs of the products. In addition, the adoption of advanced technology strengthens their positive brand image with end-consumers.

The brand values of MIT Jsc. have been emphasized clearly through its products and services offering and in a variety of its marketing activities as well. However, the firm has not seen much

progress in addressing these values online due to its meager activeness in the digital environment. Online value proposition (OVP) is a set of messages that supplement core brand proposition and highlight advantaged online elements different from those in the offline context and from online offerings of competitors. These messages are communicated in various level of detail to both online and offline audience. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick 2012, 232.)

In the case of MIT Jsc., the unfamiliarity of the mass markets with these kinds of niche products may cause ambiguity about what the company offers; and there is a fact that only a small number of audiences are actually interested in this field. Therefore, the aspects of OVP which should be focused on are educational content such as specification of the product advancement, up-to-date related technological news, and the facilitation for comparison between similar products of different brands. MIT Jsc.'s OVP is supposed to encourage business owners to upgrade their systems and share the content between particular groups of professionals.

#### **4.1.2 Objectives**

The ultimate goal of marketing is to resonate the market features and the value sets offered by a business to create a win-win situation for all stakeholders (Kotler et al. 2012, 773). The contribution of digital marketing communications to this goal is the commercial benefits acquired thanks to digital technology. Accordingly, feasible objective suggested to MIT Jsc. for this digital marketing communications plan are:

- Objective 1: Lay the groundwork in raising in B2B customers' mind the need to invest on modern equipment
- Objective 2: Increase brand awareness in the online context, or in other words, reach out to potential customers using digital channels
- Objective 3: Integrate with other marketing efforts to build and sustain strong brand relationships

#### **4.1.3 Strategic approach**

The groups of target customers defined by MIT Jsc. play a major role in determining target audience of marketing communications. From those pre-defined target organizations, individuals made up their decision-making are examined, focusing on their motivations and roles in the



buying process. The online presence of the business should go along with their online journey. Digital marketers are responsible for identifying at which point their audiences might need certain types of information, thus providing them a solution that benefits both sides. The activities of individuals represents a B2B clients in the online context are motivated by one of these three questions: “What is my problem?”, “How do I fix my problem?”, and “Are you right for me?” (Rijn 2016, cited: 20.04.2016). If the solution provided by the company’s online presence, one of these questions will lead to the next and eventually generate sales prospects. Accordingly, digital marketing efforts should be focused on education and thought leadership, presentation of products, demonstration of suitability and credibility.

Positioning strategy of digital marketing communications must consistent with the company brand image. MIT Jsc. wants its customers to think of the company as professional, reliable, diligent in customer care, and closely associated with the idea of modern technology. Therefore, all digital marketing efforts are supposed to evoke this company image in their audience’s mind both rationally and emotionally.

The digital marketing strategy for MIT Jsc. is recommended to employ both direct and indirect methods. With a clear definition of target audiences in mind, the next step is to identify all possible points of contact with them. In this case, the author suggests that the company’s online presence should be seen on business directories for related product categories, search engine, and social media. Meanwhile, direct efforts to bring visitors to the company website might include email, sales call, and referrals.

Throughout the customer cycle, elements of the digital marketing communications for MIT Jsc. together with relevant KPIs are presented in Figure 8, which is based on Chaffey’s RACE framework. The RACE framework summarizes marketing activities in four stages, namely Reach, Act, Convert, and Engage, comprehensively illustrating their functions, measurement, and how they are connected with each other (Chaffey 2015, cited: 20.04.2016).

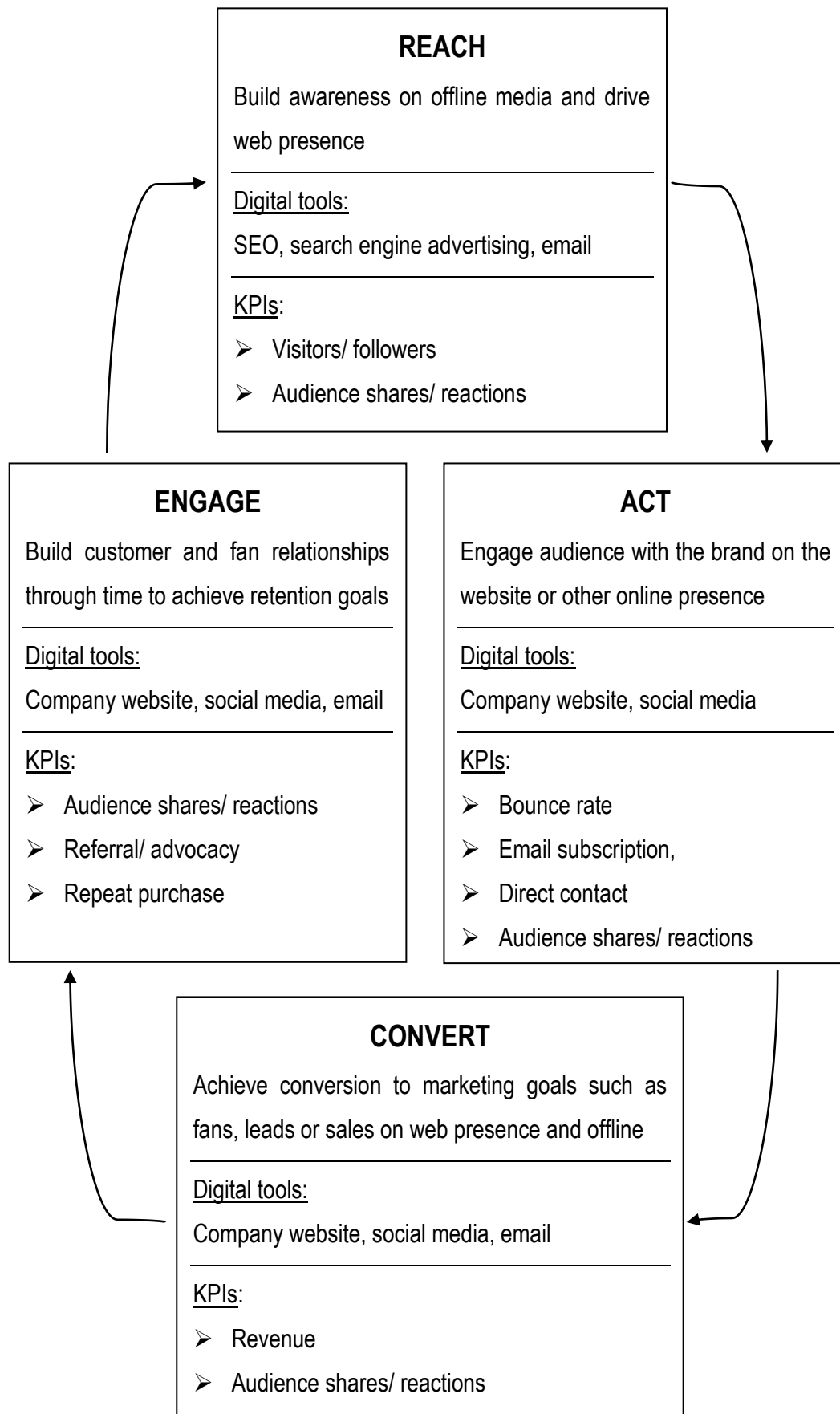


Figure 8 Digital marketing planning in RACE framework, tailored for the case of MIT Jsc. (Chaffey 2015, cited 20.04.2016.)

## 4.2 Communication design

When designing the communications, it is essential to take into consideration two aspects of content, including the visual appearance and the language. In order to convey the message of a professional equipment and service provider, the language on MIT Jsc.'s online channels should avoid hard selling or discount opportunities. In fact, for the company profile, language usage is directed to create the feeling that MIT Jsc. is putting their clients' benefits at its top and highlight the partnership level of its customer relationship strategy. For example, when presenting its achievement portfolio, instead of saying: "the company won the big contract to supply equipment for the big projects namely ...", it can be posted as the company has had the chance to successfully work with the project management team of ... and demonstrate how the solution has brought benefits to the whole system.

In terms of product information, apart from technical data which can only be understood fully by engineers, increase productivity, safety, high accuracy, emphasize the adoption of that equipment in well-developed industrial countries to create an emotional appeal. Since the specific benefits are usually left to face to face sales presentation and negotiation. The company usually does large contracts to install a system of equipment, price posting might not be necessary on its online channels. On the other hand, industrial news chosen to post on website and social media pages should be translated from their original foreign sources or share from Vietnamese sources which have high reputation in technological society.

Regarding visual appearance, product images are usually available to acquire from their manufacturers, thus MIT Jsc. can exploit those materials and save a great deal of resources. Meanwhile, based on the understanding of the author about Vietnamese culture, it can be said that Vietnamese way of thinking usually associate modernity with simplicity. Therefore, graphical design should employ flat shape, well-defined layout, and neutral color. Importantly, it is suggested that MIT Jsc. should modify its current logo due to the over similarity to Samsung logo, which can cause the impression of an unethical or unauthenticated brand.

The communication design can continue the existing theme color of dark blue which has been using in MIT Jsc.'s previous marketing materials. A white background for the website as well as product image has proved its success in enabling easy reading and highlight important features.

Text color on the white background, however, could be consider to change into dark grey to maintain its legibility while reducing the extreme contrast compared to current black text.

### **4.3 Digital marketing communications mix**

Among the variety of digital marketing communication tools, each with certain advantages and disadvantages depending on the business environment, some of them are suitable and will require considerable efforts, whereas for some others, the firm might not be better-off spending time and money on them. After analyzing the operational situation, the target customers, and the company's financial and human resources capabilities, the author have selected elements of the DMC mix that appear to be the most effective.

This part of the thesis give an answer to the sub-research questions, i.e. "which digital media should be used to effectively reach the target audience?", and "how to use those channels in a way that they complement to each other and contribute to business performance?". The following subchapter provides essential planning factors to develop an effective website for MIT Jsc. Other channels to be employed are analyzed, including search engine optimization, email marketing, and social media.

#### **4.3.1 Website**

MIT Jsc. has been operating without a website, making it now a new player in the online environment. Hence, the process of web development starts from the beginning at need assessment. As the company has no intention to trade their products online, the purpose of the website is decided to be an official source of information about the company and its offering rather than an online store. The conversion goal of the site is that visitors subscribe for emails or make direct contact for product inquiry.

The early stage of a website creation requires registration for a domain name, which should be memorable and relevant to the company. A country-specific top-level domain is better-off for MIT Jsc., which operates in a local market. In Vietnam, country-specific domains for organizations involved in commercial activities are .com.vn and .biz.vn (Ministry of Information and Communications 2016, cited 25.04.2016). Keywords can also be embodied in domain name to

optimize search engine ranking of the site (Ryan & Jones 2009, 47). The domain names mit.com.vn and mitvietnam.com.vn have already been registered by other businesses. Hence, the author suggests mittechnologies.com.vn as the name for MIT Jsc.'s website, as MIT Technologies is the name shown on the firm's logo.

Criteria for choosing a hosting service include the size, design, functionality and estimated traffic of the website, as well as reliability of the hosting company. In Vietnam nowadays, there are many companies offering inexpensive services which include all domain names, hosting, and web design. It is advisable to critically consider these cheap services as in many cases, quality align with price, for example, service request is processed only after an entire week, web down, slow speed, inflating prices. The fact that that company is providing both domain and host makes it difficult to change to another service provider when the hosting service is a disappointment, because the domain name is registered in attachment with the hosting and managed simultaneously (Van 2016, cited 24.04.2016).

The homepage content include images which represent the industrial sectors in which MIT Jsc.'s products are available, promotional images of a few products together with short descriptions, and headlines and meta-descriptions of recent news. One section is meant to provide a brief introduction of the company's establishment, mission, and operations. Available products, which are believed to be the most important content for visitors, are presented with essential information such as model name, function, and technical specification. A section of news includes collected industry-related news and events, which engage customers in considering the site as a valuable source of industrial news and encourage them to share on social media. It is recommended to combine text content with images of product, events, or news-related photos. The content structure is shown in Figure 8, which is tailored into the case of MIT Jsc. based on Ryan & Jones' simple website information hierarchy (2009, 53). The header section should show company logo and hotline telephone number. The navigation bar provides quick access to homepage, company, products, news & events, and contact. Products are listed into four categories, namely medical equipment, quality inspection equipment, heavy industry equipment, and security equipment. As the conversion goal of the website are email subscription and direct contact, the subscribe option and contact information should be shown throughout the site in an eye-catching manner.

Four key components of web design, including layout, color, font, and graphic ought to convey the message of simplicity and modernity. The combination of these elements should be made to

catch key information easily as well as direct audiences' attention to what marketers want them to. The main colors for the website of MIT Jsc. are navy blue and white, which aligns with its offline marketing materials. There are three criteria needed to keep in mind for successful web design, namely simplicity for information navigation and observance, consistency, and accessibility to important menu options throughout the site. (Seigel 2011, cited 25.04.2016.)

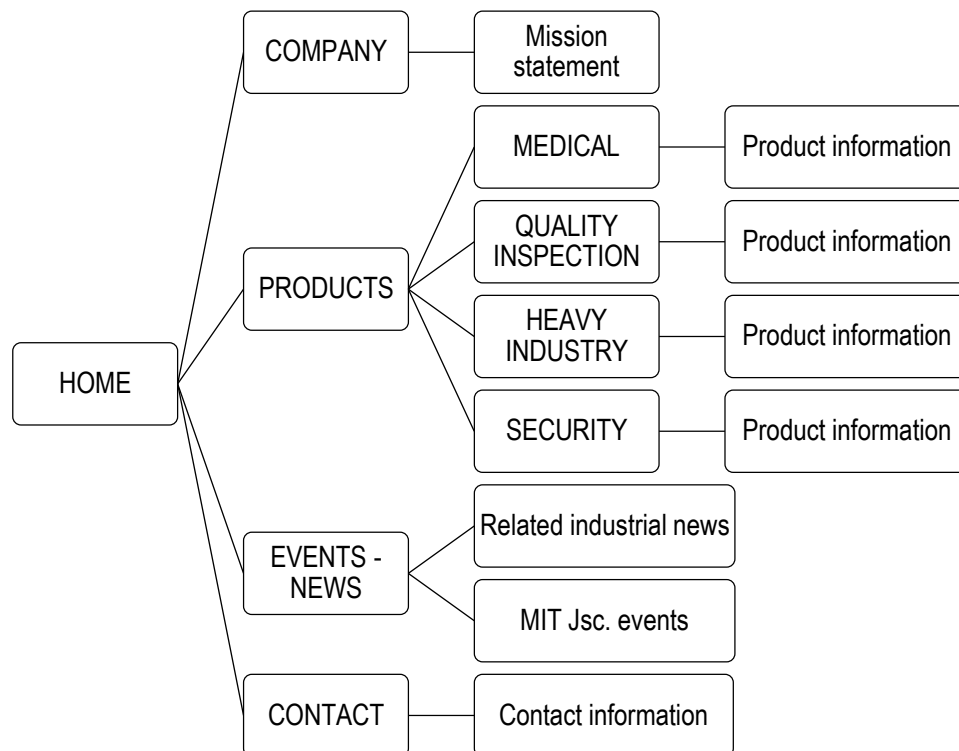


Figure 9 Simple website information hierarchy for MIT Jsc., modified from Ryan & Jones's figure (2009, 53)

#### 4.3.2 Search engine marketing

Keywords to focus on in SEO are closely connected with website content and customer demands. The company has to capture what its target audiences are searching for, whether a specific product, a function, or a supplier. Since MIT Jsc. serves in niche markets, the search of its target customers are quite specific, making it irrelevant to mind the search result ranking for such general keywords as “may khoan” (drilling machine), “camera an ninh” (security camera), “ong nhom hong ngoai” (infrared binoculars) which are likely to fit the regular markets. Instead, it is recommended to use keywords that indicate the niche features of product categories, product functions, and the related technologies. The noun words should be combined with the adjective

words indicating the high-tech, industrial, and specialized characteristics of products such as “chuyen dung” (specialized), “cong nghiep” (industrial), and “cong nghe cao” (high-tech) to make key phrases that match with searchers’ specific needs.

Content optimization plays a vital role in the company’s position in search engine result pages (SERPs), providing search engines with essential data to determine what a web page is all about. This method is applied by using the keywords and key phrases in website content, which consists of four main formats: text, image, video, and news. For MIT Jsc., the elements of website optimization should be paid attention to are title tags, meta-descriptions, and URLs. Title tags give search engine users the idea of the page’s topic in a few words, and are normally used as the link text in search result display. Meanwhile, the text shown on SERPs is known as meta-description. Meta data should summarize the content of the landing page in about 150-160 characters in a meaningful and straightforward way, with relevant keywords applied. Finally, using applicable keywords in URLs also emphasize the page’s content to search engines, making it easier to show up in relevant search. It is recommended that the content producers consider each of these elements throughout the development of content in any format. (Kuenn 2013, cited 24.04.2016.)

Also for the hope of improving ranking in SERPs, inbound links to the site are attached with the company’s profile on online business directories. In addition, website content, which should be updated regularly, is shared on social media, mostly on the company’s own channels. The link to the website homepage should also be found in the company’s social channels.

#### **4.3.3 Email marketing**

The purposes guiding the implementation of email marketing for MIT Jsc. are lead nurturing and maintain relationships with existing customers. Instead of expecting instant results with recipients buying on impulse, which is rarely the case, multiple emails are sent within a longer period of time, driven by events and content closely related to audiences’ interests.

In consideration of the relatively low budget and small target markets, MIT Jsc. can employ Mailchimp as its email marketing software. With MailChimp, a user is allowed to send up to 12,000 emails per month free of charge with a client list of 2,000 contacts. Registration for a

MailChimp account can be done even with personal email, creating an account with functional features such as drag and drop email templates, A/B testing, and integration with multiple tools. Deliverability of Mailchimp is very high at over 90 percent, which is also resulted from the requirement of Mailchimp for its users to follow its rules in email marketing implementation (CRM Viet 2015, cited 24.04.2016).

Email marketing efforts should closely cooperate with customer relationships management (CRM). As MIT Jsc. is having a relatively small customer base, it is convenient to acquire deep understanding about each of its clients, segment the list, identify what kind of content each recipient is likely to be interested to, and apply to the emails. Therefore, email can be sent after sales to follow the level of satisfaction, encourage feedback, and update about events related to the clients such as extension, anniversary of contract signing, use count, new activities or development in a relationship between the two parties. These contents are provided in conjunction with links to related pages in the company's website, guiding audiences to further discover the site.

#### **4.3.4 Social media**

The initial impact of social media marketing for MIT Jsc. is expected to start modestly but grow constantly over the long run. At the moment, the adoption of social media in the company's digital marketing plan aims at increasing brand interaction with prospects and the number of inbound links to the website, thus also supporting SEO. Advertising on social media is believed to be unnecessary in this case.

SlideShare is a handy tool to show the expertise of MIT Jsc. to its target groups. The channel allows the company to upload professional materials and share the content in other channels. Internet users who are using search engines to find these particular kinds of information are likely to have influence on the buying process of the target business customers. Therefore, interactions on SlideShare help the company to reach new prospects as well as engage its audiences, consolidating the brand image.

Although at the moment, the use of LinkedIn to search for business partners in Vietnam is still limited, statistics have shown an upward trend in this practice (Trung 2016, cited 24.04.2016).



Therefore, it is recommended for MIT Jsc. to start develop its profile and build its connections in the network. At this early stage, the effort can come in only moderate frequency, getting connected with and endorse B2B customers and partners who have already had LinkedIn accounts, showing company's professional activities, as well as timely updating major changes in company's profile.

#### **4.4 Evaluation and control**

Digital marketing communication is a part of the overall integrated marketing communication, where it coordinates with other offline methods to deliver a consistent message about the company. Return on investment (ROI) has to be calculated at some point to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan. With close relationships with key clients, MIT Jsc. can directly get feedback about its efforts with the website and emails, thus roughly estimate their performance. Otherwise, KPIs such as number of visitors, page views, conversion rate and bounce rate are checked on weekly basis, with the help of Google Analytics, which is a free tool to measure online marketing performance. With data collected and reported by Google Analytics, marketers in MIT Jsc. can quickly capture the picture of their online customers across the website and social channels, thus promoting its right move, improving the quality of the site and eliminating unnecessary things to save resources.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

The literature reviews as well as the situation analysis have produced key findings to apply to the digital marketing communications development plan for MIT Jsc. Digital marketing has become an essential element of the marketing mix, especially when it is being implemented by the competitors and expected by customers. Communications via digital channels have proved its advantages in capturing the attention of internet users and covering a large proportion of audiences while customizing the messages to match specific individual's needs. Proper adoption of digital marketing communications allows businesses to raise brand awareness, attract and retain buyers, and increase market share with a relatively lower budget than traditional marketing methods.

With the website being the center of the online marketing structure, digital marketing communications must function in coordination with other offline media to reinforce a strong and consistent message about the brand. Therefore, content management is essential to ensure the effectiveness of each channel and of their combination. The integration in communications is developed from a coherent marketing strategy where different elements of the marketing mix are aligned and designed based on understanding of customer expectations and behavior.

The situation analysis reveals the biggest challenges facing Vietnamese B2B firms in adopting digital marketing, especially SMEs, to be the lack of competency and resources to produce qualified content and to allocate the efforts efficiently. MIT Jsc. is a small company operating in multiple niche markets, so it is crucial to have a form of communications that both widely spreads out the message and narrow the focus to the small amount of customers with highly specific needs at the same time.

With the current situation being relied on a few but loyal clients, the main goal for MIT Jsc. in its early stage of applying digital marketing communications is to increase online brand awareness and larger its customer base. The process consists of developing a company website as an official online presence, supported by search engines marketing, email marketing and social media to ultimately convert prospects into buying actions. The development plan always bears in mind the limited resources and small scale operations of the firm to avoid irrelevant efforts.

## 6 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this thesis was to create a digital marketing communication plan for a Vietnamese SME operating in the high-tech machinery sector. In the attempt to answer the research question of how to apply digital media into marketing in an effective way, the main research method was desktop study. The thesis started from literature review chapter and followed by the empirical parts. Marketing theory was examined from the broad concept of strategic marketing, including marketing research, segmentation, targeting and positioning, marketing objectives, and marketing mix, to organizational buyer behavior and relationship marketing, and finally marketing communications where digital communications are integrated to other communication efforts through a marketing communication planning process. Moreover, the benefits, drawbacks and common practices of major online marketing methods were explained in order to prepare for appropriate choices in designing the communication mix for the particular case company.

The development plan was conducted based on this theoretical framework and the situation analysis. By following this plan, MIT Jsc. is supposed to achieve positive brand awareness on the online environment, gaining new clients and efficiently maintain its relationships with existing ones. Online value propositions of the case company include advanced technological solutions with promising returns on investment, qualified augmented services and thoughtful customer care. The digital marketing communications were planned in terms of structure, format, and content. Communication methods influence prospects throughout the buying process, illustrated by the RACE model (Reach, Act, Convert, and Engage). Offline methods such as sales calls, trade fairs, and referrals are designed to catch customers' initial attention, which causes them to reach the company via search engines, the website, and social media such as LinkedIn. The company's website is the main online platform to provide target audiences with information about its market offerings and its level of reliability and trustworthiness as a supplier. These efforts are expected to accomplish measureable conversion goals such as direct contact for a deal, follow on social channels, or subscribe to receive emails. Emails and social media posts then direct audiences to further discover certain information available on the website which will be useful for them, and constantly remind them of the brand as well.

Generally, the author is satisfied with the thesis outcomes, which suggests a feasible digital marketing communications plan for the commissioner, which fill the gap between marketing

communications theory and the practical business environment the case company is operating in. Effective collaboration between two parties has allowed the author to gain sufficient understanding of the commissioner's needs, capability, and vision, which were essential to create a valid marketing plan. The work was conducted in fair timing, beginning from February 2016 and finishing around May of the same year.

Desktop research was the main method to develop the plan. During the thesis process, a variety of materials including books, e-books, research papers, online journals and articles were studied, in addition to Skype interviews with the case company's representative and a marketing expert in Vietnam. Comparison was made between different sources in order to select relevant information and draw a comprehensive view of the issue.

A limitation of the thesis was that information over customer behaviors and market trends are gathered from the view point of the sellers more than from the buyers. In this thesis, the author developed digital marketing communications as an integrated part of the whole marketing communication strategy. Further projects could be done focusing on the technical aspects of each digital platform that have been chosen. In fact, the author is interested in directly participating in the web design process, managing the consistency of different channels and following up the results of the communication efforts on customer relationships.

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